

7 hurt in march in S. Africa against Israel

CAPE TOWN (AFP) — Seven policemen and a press photographer were injured Friday when police clashed with a group of Muslims protesting outside the Israeli embassy here over Israel's ouster of Hamas guerrillas in Lebanon last month. Thousands of Muslims, under the banner of the Islamic Unity Convention (IUC), marched through central Cape Town to present a memorandum to the Israeli ambassador. When they found the embassy doors locked and barricaded by security forces, the protesters began throwing stones and other missiles at the police, the SABA news agency said. Three policemen were seriously hurt, two of them struck by objects thrown by the protesters and the third a blow on the leg with a steel pipe. Police retaliated by firing rubber bullets and birdshot. Some of the protesters set fire to an Israeli flag and others tore a sign off the wall of the nearby United States Information Service building during the march. IUC national Chairman Archmat Cassiem, addressing the crowd from the back of a truck, tried to calm the protesters during the fracas. "We will choose our battlefield," he said. "Don't let the enemy choose it for us."

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية مستقلة بالانجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الاردنية. الراي.

Nigeria denies hosting Hizbollah

ABUJA (AFP) — The Nigerian Foreign Ministry on Friday issued a statement denying allegations that the Iranian-backed fundamentalist movement Hizbollah had training bases in Nigeria. "It has become necessary to state clearly, for the benefit of the public, that there is no truth whatsoever in the allegation that there are Hizbollah training bases in Nigeria," the statement said. It also denied reports that the Israeli government had protested to the Nigerian government over the allegations, which it said were "malicious." Nigerian Ambassador to Tel Aviv Ignatius Olseneke, met officials from the Israeli foreign ministry and both sides agreed there were no Hizbollah training bases in Nigeria, the statement continued. National Israeli radio reported last week that the Israeli government had officially protested to Nigeria over the presence of a Hizbollah base in the country. It added that a similar protest had been delivered to Pretoria over the presence of five militia bases, run by the pro-Iranian movement in South Africa. That report was also denied by the Israeli embassies in Pretoria and Lagos.

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Israel delays Hebron pullout until after May 29 elections

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Israel on Friday delayed its partial withdrawal from the flashpoint town of Hebron until after the May 29 general elections, drawing swift accusations from the Palestinians of breaking the peace accord.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres, who is also the defence minister, made the decision after meeting with military chiefs in Tel Aviv, sources close to the Israeli leader said.

But until the redeployment

goes ahead the army will continue to withdraw equipment from the West Bank town and could make a symbolic gesture to the Palestinians by evacuating some posts, they added.

Mr. Peres, who said after the meeting he was "in no hurry to fix a date" for the partial pullout which is already more than a month behind schedule, published a statement saying it would be coordinated with the Palestinians.

The vagueness of the state-

ment left the prime minister with some scope for manoeuvre. But the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) angrily denounced the new delay. "Israel is going back to its old habits of breaking the accords and not fulfilling its commitments," said Hassan Asfour, the head of the authority's negotiations department.

"This certainly won't help the peace process," he added, accusing Mr. Peres of "following the opinion of the

right-wing extremists in Israel and the (Jewish) settlers." Military chiefs warned Mr. Peres of the increased risk of anti-Israeli attacks during the election period by both settlers and Palestinians opposed to the deals struck between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) to launch Palestinian self-rule.

The withdrawal of Israeli troops from most of the town had been due to take place in

(Continued on page 7)

King underlines role of the press in strengthening tolerance and pluralism

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Hussein, marking World Press Freedom Day, has stressed the importance and the responsibility of the information media in strengthening tolerance and pluralism in the whole world. "I am particularly pleased to be able to join in celebrating the World Press Freedom day," the King said in a message to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). "This is an event that assumes special significance not only in view of the fact that it coincides with UNESCO's 50th anniversary, which in itself is a cause of celebration to us and to all those who have witnessed UNESCO's contributions over the past fifty years, but also because we have always held the strong conviction that the ideals of pluralism are the normal state of affairs, and that exclusivism, xenophobia, and dogmatism are the deviations.

"The ideal of tolerance, which the United Nations has honoured by declaring 1995 the United Nations' Year of Tolerance, is best preserved by continued vigilance over free and pluralistic media. The role of the free and responsible media in shaping public opinion cannot be overestimated. Tolerance and pluralism play a central part in how we think our region should be shaped. But in advocating this, we are not importing foreign ideas, or outlandish concepts. We base our views on our spiritual and moral traditions in which the equality and dignity of mankind is universally and irrevocably proclaimed. Once more, it gives me a great pleasure to express my felicitations and to wish you all success." (see related story on page 12)

Chirac invites King

French President Jacques Chirac has extended an invitation to King Hussein to visit Paris for talks over a working dinner on Monday, according to a report in Al-Dustour Arabic daily.

King Hussein, who is currently in London, held talks on Thursday with British Prime Minister John Major



His Majesty King Hussein with British Prime Minister John Major at 10 Downing Street on Thursday (Reuters photo)

King thanks Regent

The King has sent a cable to His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, thanking him for a message of good wishes marking the 43rd anniversary of the Monarch's assumption of his constitutional powers and pledging his continued endeavours to build the nation.

"The obstacles and the difficulties which stood in our path were overcome by the Jordanian people, and the Kingdom has achieved progress and attained peace, stability and security that will enable its people to pursue the course of construction and development," said King Hussein.

"On the same day when I stood before Parliament in Amman, taking the oath of protecting the Constitution and serving the nation, thus assuming my constitutional powers my cousin and childhood companion, the late

King Faisal, was sworn in, assuming the same powers in his country, but the forces of evil have prevented him from leadership and from serving his country," said the King. "The years of my endeavours to serve the nation and its interests are still fresh in my memory, and I will continue to cherish the true feelings of affection to my people. I am determined to carry on the task of leading the nation towards more construction for the future generations, seeking only God's blessing and satisfaction," the King said.

The Regent had sent the King a cable expressing his good wishes and those of the government and people of Jordan on the anniversary. "On this occasion we all remember your sacrifices and your leadership and wisdom in the face of the difficulties and your dedicated efforts to serve the nation," the Regent said.

Arafat returns to Gaza

GAZA CITY (Agencies) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat returned Friday to Gaza without making a planned stop in Cairo for talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, officials said. The Palestinian National Authority's (PNA) Planning Minister Nabil Shaath said earlier Mr. Arafat would meet Mr. Mubarak for talks ahead of "final status" negotiations with Israel, but no explanation was given by Mr. Arafat or his aides as to why the stopover did not happen.

A Palestinian source said Mr. Arafat could leave for Egypt before Sunday to discuss the negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Tabu.

The talks are expected to formally open Sunday in the Hilton Hotel before being adjourned until after Israel's general election on May 29.

The negotiations will deal with the thorniest issues still remaining including the fate of East Jerusalem, the Palestinian refugees, and Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza.

Dr. Shaath said Mr. Arafat was due to "inform Mubarak of the results of his meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and U.S. President Bill Clinton" in Washington.

Mr. Arafat had his first official meeting as Palestinian president with Mr. Clinton in Washington on Wednesday.

The U.S. president congratulated Mr. Arafat for winning an agreement to scrap clauses in the Palestinian charter calling for Israel's destruction at a meeting of the Palestine National Council last week (see page 2).

Israeli purposely targeted Cana shelter, U.N. asserts

UNITED NATIONS (Agencies) — A U.N. envoy has reached a preliminary conclusion that Israeli artillery deliberately targeted a U.N. base in southern Lebanon, killing 102 Lebanese sheltering there, informed sources said Friday.

The sources told AFP that General Frank van Kappen, sent by the U.N. secretary-general to investigate the April 18 shelling of the Cana camp which triggered international condemnation, concluded that the Israeli artillery battery knew they were targeting the U.N. compound.

But he also decided that "someone" in the army chain of command had made a "grave error" by ordering the attack, the sources said.

Gen. Kappen's report, which, according to U.N. officials, has not yet been finalised pending "clarifications" expected from the Israeli army, also reveals that Hizbollah guerrillas and their families were sheltering in the camp.

The guerrillas had gone into neighbouring hills to rocket northern Israel 15 minutes before the Israeli attack, before returning inside the camp, the sources said.

Gen. Kappen was still trying to establish whether an Israeli reconnaissance drone was in the area before the attack, which would have provided a video picture of the compound when it was fired on.

That aspect would be a key

factor in finally determining whether the Israelis had deliberately targeted the civilian compound.

The Israeli government has called the incident an "unfortunate mistake" but asserted that the Hizbollah guerrillas had fired from within 300 metres of the U.N. camp, where hundreds of civilians had sought shelter from Israeli raids on Lebanon.

Israeli officials from the U.N. mission were briefed on Gen. Kappen's initial findings on Thursday by Under-Secretary General Kofi Annan.

The final report would be submitted to U.N. Secretary General Boutros Ghali once the Israeli army had re-

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U.S. to follow up closely after Arafat, Peres visits

WASHINGTON (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres' and Palestinian Leader Yasser Arafat's back-to-back visits to the White House last week led to a tightening of defence ties with Israel and a start on regular U.S. contacts with the Palestine National Authority (PNA).

Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak is expected to visit the U.S. in the next week or two to discuss establishing a formal defence agreement with the United States, Mr. Peres said Israel was not asking for U.S. troops, only "technicians" to enforce peace accords with the Arabs.

President Bill Clinton signed an agreement with Mr. Peres to provide U.S.

counter-terrorism technology and information, while Defence Secretary William Perry told the Israeli leader congress would be asked to approve stepped-up development of a new laser to shoot down the rockets Hizbollah has fired on villages in northern Israel.

Mr. Barak is likely to get at least a promise that U.S. Navy Phalanx missiles can be tested by Israel on land as an interim weapon until the laser is developed. Even more significant will be the work Mr. Barak will do with Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Mr. Perry on a U.S.-Israeli defence accord.

In another development, Mr. Christopher expressed increased scepticism that

President Hafez Al Assad of Syria will make peace with Israel, the Los Angeles Times reported Friday.

In an interview with the newspaper, Mr. Christopher said, even though Mr. Assad helped negotiate last week's Mideast cease-fire, "I am more concerned than ever as to whether he will be able to execute his intention (for peace) because of his suspicion and fear. His hesitancy and his mistrust is so deep that it causes apprehension, worrying that somehow he's been taken advantage of by the Israelis."

As for a U.S.-Israel defence treaty, it was proposed more than 20 years ago by the late J. William Fulbright, a

(Continued on page 7)

Eritrea and Yemen disagree over terms of court arbitration

PARIS (AFP) — Yemen and Eritrea Friday disagreed over the terms of the arbitration of their dispute on the Hanish islands, with Sanaa insisting any ruling would be limited to the island of Hanish Al Kabir.

"The Republic of Yemen welcomes the accord on the principles of the arbitration, aimed at solving peacefully the conflict on the future of the whole archipelago — nine islands.

But Sanaa has always said discussions about the islands should be limited to Hanish Al Kabir.

The two countries agreed to settle the dispute in an arbitration court rather than at the International Court of Justice in the Hague to "speed matters up."

The statement from the French foreign ministry announcing the accord did not specify the exact area of the conflict.

Yemeni Deputy Foreign Minister Ghali Ali Gamil said Friday that "the court would consist of three judges — each of the two countries would pick one, and the third would be chosen by common agreement."

Mr. Gamil said it was up to mediator Gutman to decide where the court would sit, adding that Mr. Gutman had already suggested Paris and

(Continued on page 3)

U.S. denies spy-in-sky mission over France

PARIS (R) — The United States denied a French press report on Friday that one of its U-2 spy planes had been spying on secret installations in France, saying the aircraft in question was returning from a mission over Bosnia.

The daily Liberation said the flight, in March, was sent from an air base in England to pierce the secrets of budding Anglo-French nuclear cooperation.

"It is not the intent of the U.S. government to conduct operations beyond current agreements we have with the government of France," the U.S. European Command Headquarters said in a statement distributed by the American embassy in Paris.

"Our aircraft do not use their surveillance equipment, not even for testing, over French territory," it said.

The French military also quashed the story published

by the left-leaning daily but hinted that Paris suspected spy missions had taken place less than three years ago.

Both sides appeared eager to avoid a repeat of a major row last year when Paris publicly denounced a U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operation aimed at gathering secret information on French international trade negotiating strategy.

Liberation said a U-2 aircraft based in England carried out a high-altitude photo reconnaissance mission in March linked with the possible loading aboard British Royal Air Force aircraft of French nuclear warheads which the United States declined to supply to Britain.

The U.S. military statement said the flight mentioned by the daily took off and was returning to Istres air

(Continued on page 3)

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Peace is strategic objective, Arafat tells U.S. audience

WASHINGTON (USIA) — Visiting Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat says that achieving peace in the Middle East "is not impossible." Rather, he continued, it is "the objective of our two people" in Israel and Palestine and those in the entire region.

He added, however, there are two conditions for achieving peace in the Middle East — an international consensus to put an end to "continuous war" in the region and the "sincere and precise" implementation of the resolutions of "international legitimacy" and the Palestinian-Israeli agreements signed at Oslo, Washington and Cairo.

The Palestinian leader made his remarks in Arabic to a select audience of primarily American Jewish and Palestinian American businessmen attending a "Consultation on the New Middle East." The closed-door conference was arranged by the Centre for Middle East Peace and Economic Cooperation which had key congressmen, senior government officials and Arab and Israeli diplomats and officials speaking to the group.

Mr. Arafat was told by the centre's president, former Congressman Wayne Owens, that he was being received in Washington this week unlike previous visits "in his own right as a president of a democratic government."

Mr. Arafat was at the White House on two previous occasions, the first to sign the declaration of principles with the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in September 1993 and again last September when he and Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres signed the interim agreement. The latter agreement was witnessed by President Mubarak of Egypt and King Hussein.

The Palestinian leader was also described as one who "keeps his word" in having, the Palestinian National Council (PNC) drop all the anti-Israeli articles from the Palestinian charter last week at its meeting in Gaza — a step which Mr. Arafat was assured "Jews worldwide appreciated."

"We salute, with admiration, the strong leadership which... Arafat and his associates displayed... in effecting the repeal of the provisions of the Palestinian charter which have delayed further progress in their negotiations with Israel," the chairman of the centre, S. Daniel Abraham, and Mr. Owens said in a joint statement published in the programme of the three-day conference.

Mr. Arafat arrived here April 30 for a meeting with President Clinton the following morning. His only other activity on his first afternoon in Washington was a brief meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, who was departing later that night to Paris en route home.

Elaborating on the two conditions, the Palestinian leader advised that "this international consensus must materialise through (the international community's) active participation in (Middle East) peacemaking."

A "just and comprehensive peace" in the region can be achieved, he told the group,

through the implementation of U.N. resolutions 242 and 338. "The Palestinian people are strongly committed to the peace of the region," which Mr. Arafat said "cannot be achieved without the sincere and precise implementation" of international resolutions and the Palestinian-Israeli interim agreements.

He reminded them that the Palestinian National Council agreed to delete the anti-Israel clauses in the Palestinian charter in spite of the "very difficult circumstances created by the (Israel) closure and collective punishment" following the three suicide bomb attacks which left more than 60 people dead in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Ashkelon.

This "historic resolution" and the recent national elections, he continued, demonstrated the strong commitment of the Palestinian people to continue with the peace process, to implement all our obligations entered under our agreements with the government of Israel.

He also said the PNC vote was for "a negotiated settlement on the basis of two states, a Palestinian state next to an Israeli state." He added, "We respect our commitment, our obligation and we will honour our signature. For us, the peace process is irreversible."

Describing the recent Israeli shelling in South Lebanon as "tragic and painful," he pointed out that peace in the Middle East cannot be reached through Israeli policies of "closure, siege, starvation, collective punishment." He added that there are about 120,000 Palestinian workers without jobs and the Palestinian economy is losing about \$6 million a day as a result of the ban on entering Israel.

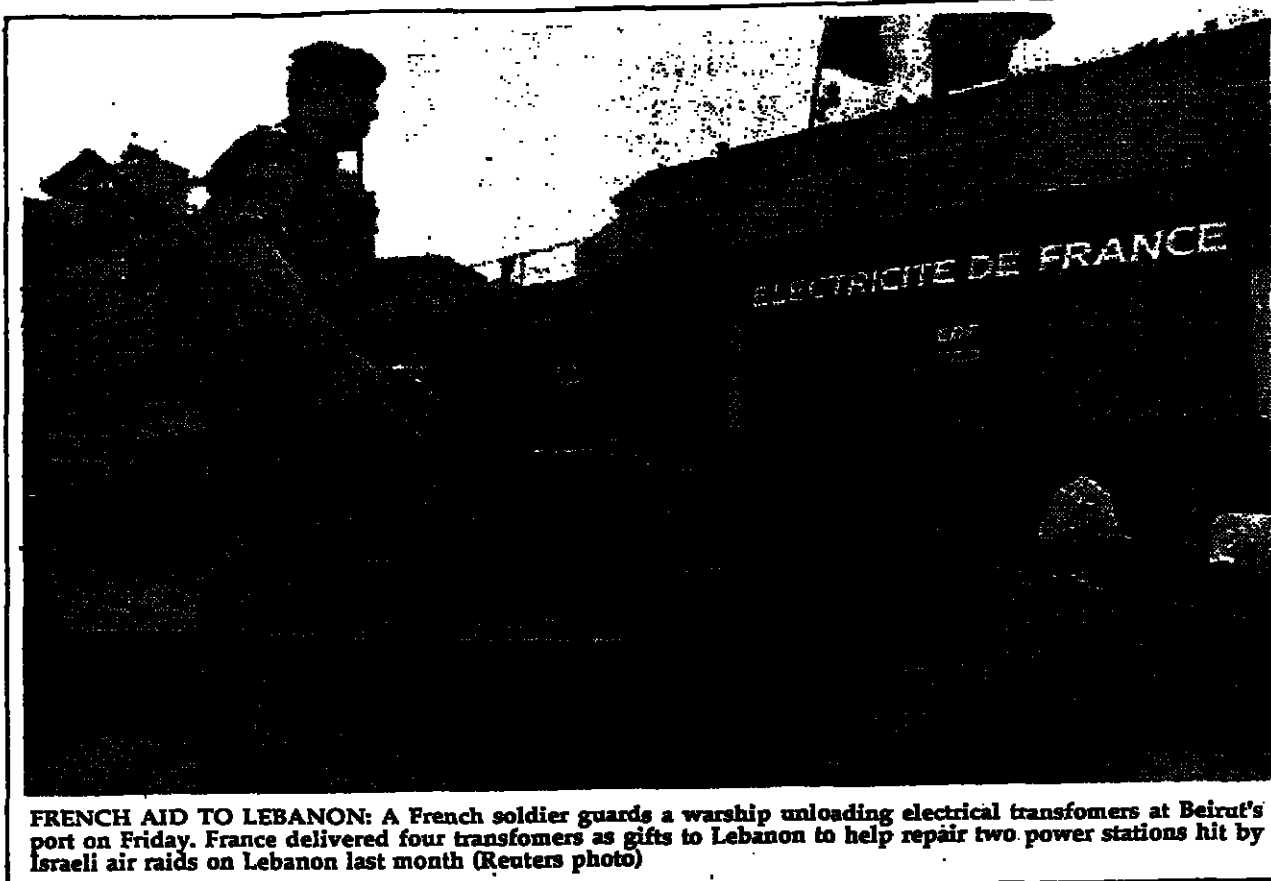
After making an emotional appeal for economic assistance, he continued: "Our people aspire to achieve peace worthy of their trust, peace that can guarantee security and stability for all in the region, peace that can deliver prosperity and progress for the Palestinian people and the other people in the region. The Palestinian people have suffered enough for their freedom..."

Mr. Arafat pointed out that the upcoming permanent status talks, due to begin next week in Taba, Egypt, aim at reaching in the Palestinian view "an acceptable and satisfactory" solution for the remaining major issues of "Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, borders, water, external security, external relations and other important and sensitive issues."

He again assured his audience that "we are determined to find solutions through political negotiations."

The Palestinian leader reiterated at this point that "East Jerusalem is an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied as a result of the June 1967 war," and thereby U.N. resolutions 242 and 338 which call for the exchange of land for peace are applicable.

"Jerusalem must be a city of peace and harmony," he stressed. "Holy Jerusalem must be an open city without walls or obstacles between the followers" of Islam, Christianity and Judaism.



FRENCH AID TO LEBANON: A French soldier guards a warship unloading electrical transformers at Beirut's port on Friday. France delivered four transformers as gifts to Lebanon to help repair two power stations hit by Israeli air raids on Lebanon last month (Reuters photo)

U.S. will not interfere in final status negotiations — Clinton

WASHINGTON (USIA) — With Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on final status issues in the offing, President Bill Clinton declared anew on Wednesday that the United States would serve no useful purpose "by getting in the middle of decisions which have to be resolved by the parties themselves."

Turning what a White House spokesman termed "the extraordinary into the routine," Mr. Clinton met in the Oval Office with Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestinian National Authority, to discuss the Middle East peace process as a whole, security for all people in the region, and the challenge of economic development in Palestinian lands.

Mr. Clinton told reporters he was meeting Mr. Arafat because "it is time for us to discuss the continuation of the peace process, what we can do to help improve the welfare of the Palestinian people, and what we can do together to improve the security of all the people in the region."

Mr. Clinton and his spokesman made a point of lauding Mr. Arafat for the change in the Palestinian covenant, which eliminates references to the destruction of Israel. That vote, Mr. Clinton commented, came under "difficult circumstances" because of Israeli attacks on southern Lebanon.

Asked if the United States would "endorse" creation of a Palestinian state as enthusiastically as Washington had worked for creation of Israel in 1948, the president said the Israelis and Palestinians should resolve such issues in their talks, which are set to resume after being suspended in March.

"We are going to do everything we can do," Mr. Clinton insisted when pressed on the issue, "not to get in the way of these parties making a permanent peace that suits them. That's what we want to do."

David Johnson, deputy White House press secretary and spokesman for the National Security Council staff, told reporters the "real significance" of the Arafat meeting "is the fact that it took place, that the extraordinary has become the routine in our work on the Middle East peace process."

The 45-minute meeting, which Mr. Johnson described as "warm," was Mr. Arafat's first bilateral session in the Oval Office, although the chairman has been present for multilateral sessions connected with signing ceremonies. Mr. Arafat is in Washington on a private visit associated with a conference sponsored by the Centre for Middle East Peace and Reconciliation.

"The president," he said, "reviewed progress in the

peace process, especially the forthcoming talks on final status issues." He told Mr. Arafat, Mr. Johnson said, that the final status talks, combined with Israel's resumed commitment to withdraw from Hebron, "was evidence of the good faith of the parties."

On security matters, Mr. Clinton and Mr. Arafat "reviewed steps" to combat terrorism, with the president expressing appreciation for measures Mr. Arafat has already taken, but advising him "this effort was one that was going to require sustained vigilance."

In the review of economic development, Mr. Clinton recalled that the United States has delivered \$156 million of the five-year pledge of \$500 million. Mr. Johnson said the president assured Arafat that Washington will "stand by the remainder of our commitment and will work with others" in the international community to fulfill them.

Mr. Johnson told a questioner the two leaders had a brief discussion of work done by Secretary of State Warren Christopher in recent weeks on a joint committee to oversee relations. Mr. Johnson said there has been "a decision to work together toward a more established mechanism for us to do business." The idea was to be discussed further in Arafat's later meeting with Christopher.

Le Pen may visit Iraq

PARIS (R) — France's Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the ultra-right National Front, plans to meet President Saddam Hussein on a visit to Iraq later this month, the newspaper Le Monde said on Friday.

The paper quoted Jean-Michel Dubois, a Paris regional councillor for the front and an official of the SOS-Iraqi Children Association, as saying that Mr. Le Pen would visit Iraq from May 12-22.

Mr. Dubois said Mr. Le Pen would accompany his wife Jany, who heads the association and who is due to hand over to Iraqi authorities two ambulances and medicine paid for by the group. The couple may meet President Saddam on that occasion.

There was no immediate confirmation from the national front.

Mr. Le Pen's last meeting with President Saddam was on a trip to Baghdad in November 1990, during the Gulf war. Mr. Le Pen backed President Saddam in the conflict and has since lobbied for the United Nations to lift its embargo on Iraq.

Mr. Le Pen, who advocates an international union of "patriots," has recently boosted his foreign contacts and in February attended a lavish silver wedding celebration for his Russian counterpart Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party (IDPR).

"Even though it is not in the National Front's nature to intervene in the political life of other countries, it intends to build closer links with and to favour the growth of movements whose main objective is the defence of their nation," said Dominique Chaboché, in charge of international relations.

Mr. Le Pen, who won 15 per cent of the vote in his third run for the French presidential last June, spent more than three decades on the outer fringes of French politics before an anti-immigration crusade made him a major player on the national stage in the early 1980s.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Lebanese government grants graded pay rise

BEIRUT (R) — The Lebanese government has announced a graded private sector pay increase including a 20 per cent rise on the 250,000 Lebanese pounds (\$158) monthly minimum wage. The decision, announced after a late-night cabinet meeting on Thursday, followed demands by the General Labour Confederation (CGIL) for a 100 per cent increase in the minimum wage and a 76 per cent increase in other wages. The government's decision, backdated to Jan. 1, 1996, gave a 20 per cent increase for wages up to 250,000 pounds, 10 per cent on the next 550,000 pounds and five per cent for wages above 800,000 pounds. CGIL officials were not immediately available for comment.

Iran denies building shelters along Gulf

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran has denied U.S. reports that it was building underground shelters for military equipment along the Gulf, the official news agency IRNA reported Friday. Foreign Ministry spokesman Mahmoud Mahmoudi, quoted by IRNA, said the U.S. allegations were designed to "divert attention from its sale of sophisticated arms" to Israel. Tehran's aim is to clear the region of arms of mass destruction, he said. The spokesman charged that Washington was mounting an anti-Iranian campaign because of its "policy failure" during Israel's onslaught against Iranian-backed guerrillas in Lebanon. U.S. Defence Secretary William Perry said Wednesday that Washington was closely watching Iran's tunnelling of underground shelters for military equipment in coastal areas along the Gulf. "The concern we have is that Iran in various ways is trying to intimidate and threaten its neighbours," Mr. Perry said. He said the underground shelters were "obviously for replacing military equipment" but refused to be more specific about the types of weapons systems they could be used for.

Limasol porters start two-day strike

NICOSIA (R) — Licenced porters in the coastal town of Limasol, Cyprus's largest port, began a two-day strike on Friday to push for increases in their rates. Cyprus Port Authority (CPA) officials told Reuters cargo vessels were not being taken to storage from vessels because of the strike, but otherwise the port was operating normally. The licenced porters' association is seeking a 30 per cent increase in their tariffs, which is subject to approval from the port authority. "The Cyprus Ports Authority said an increase of 15 per cent was justified and out of that sum porters pay back to the authority five per cent for use of port facilities," said a CPA official, adding that porters turned down the proposal. The port of Larnaca further east on the southern coast of the island has not been affected by the strike, the official said.

Police academy firebombed in Istanbul

ISTANBUL (AFP) — Unidentified attackers hurled a firebomb at Uskudar police academy here early Friday, causing material damage but no casualties, police said. They said an illegal leftist organisation was thought to be responsible for the bombing. The attack came in the wake of bloody fighting between police and extreme left-wing demonstrators here during May Day celebrations in which three people were killed and scores of others injured.

Korea's Lee to visit Turkey next week

ANKARA (AFP) — South Korean Prime Minister Lee Soo Sung will visit Turkey next week at the invitation of his Turkish counterpart Mesut Yilmaz in a move aimed at boosting bilateral ties, the Foreign Ministry said Friday. Mr. Lee will also meet with President Suleyman Demirel and other senior officials during his stay in Turkey between May 9 and 12. "During this visit that will contribute to the traditional friendship between Turkey and South Korea, the two countries will seek to further develop economic and trade relations," the Turkish foreign ministry said in a statement. Ties between Ankara and Seoul date back to early 1950s when Turkish armed forces backed the South in the three-year Korean war.

Socialists prefer Israel's Peres — delegate

TUNIS (R) — Members of the International Socialist Organisation's Middle East committee want to see Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres win Israel's May 29 elections, the Senegalese delegate said on Friday in Tunis. "The Israeli Labour Party is better placed than any rightist party to continue the peace process. It is normal for us socialists to play the Peres horse..." To encourage him to continue the peace process, him, Interior Minister Jacques Baudin, who represents his country's ruling Socialist Party, told journalists.

Turkish army said cutting off Kurdish villages

ANKARA (AP) — An offensive by Turkish troops against Kurdish guerrillas in arid mountains in the southeast has left some Kurdish villages without food deliveries for a month, a human rights group contended Friday. "The army has been blocking villages for a month," said Nazmi Gur, deputy secretary of Ankara-based Human Rights Association. Military officials denied the allegation. "This is an invention by Kurdish rebels," said Kemal Ay, a spokesman for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The pro-Kurdish daily Demokrasi reported Friday that 15 villages in a triangle between the towns of Lice and Kulp in Diyarbakir province and Genç in Bingöl province were cut off from the outside world. Less than 1,000 people total live in the villages, the human rights advocates say. Monitoring the precise effects of the blockade has been practically impossible, they say, because entrance to the villages by outsiders is barred and there is no telephone communication.

Turkey-Israel deal misunderstood — Musa

CAIRO (AFP) — Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa, returning from Ankara on Friday, said Arab fears of a Turkish-Israeli military pact were based on "exaggerations" of the agreement.

"There was much misrepresentation and exaggeration about the formula in which this agreement was put forward," Mr. Musa told journalists upon arrival at Cairo airport.

Mr. Musa said he would present President Hosni Mubarak with a "detailed report" on his discussions with Turkish President Suleyman Demirel and Foreign Minister Emre Gönensay about the accord.

accord signed on Feb. 23, which allows training flights by Israeli pilots in Turkish airspace, has caused an uproar in the Middle East.

But Mr. Musa said at a press conference in Ankara Thursday he was "absolutely satisfied by hearing that it is not a strategic pact and is only a classical training agreement, nothing beyond that."

He said Egypt would not oppose the Turkish-Israeli deal as long as it did not pave the way for a strategic military pact.

Egypt and other Arab states, including Iran, Syria and Libya, condemned the accord saying it was aimed against Turkey's Arab neighbours.

Mr. Musa said earlier in Ankara that Turkey and Egypt had also discussed reactivating a dormant military cooperation agreement which could include cooperation in the defence industry.

"I have discussed with Turkish defence minister (Oltan Sungurlu) the reactivation of the (military cooperation) agreement," he said without giving details.

Turkey and Egypt signed a framework accord on military cooperation in 1991, envisaging cooperation in several fields, including training and defence industry.

However, apart from an aircraft deal involving the United States, little was done to put it into effect.

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PROGRAMME TWO

10:00 ... Lucky Luke (Cartoon)
11:30 ... The Crystal Maze
12:10 ... Three's Company
12:30 ...

Movie: "High Plains Drifter"

14:15 ... Claps of the Unconquered

14:40 ... Growing Pains

15:05 ... South by South East

15:30 ... "Drop Dead Gorgeous"

17:00 ... Only the Lonely

17:15 ... Sports — Rock Legends

17:30 ...

Movie: "Les Plus Belles Soirées"

18:00 ... Sade — Chateau Valon

18:30 ... News in French

19:15 ... Magazine — Fast Fun Fever

19:30 ... News Headlines

19:55 ... Toquela & Bonetti

20:30 ...

Mini Series — "Charlemagne" (Part 1 of 3)

22:00 ... News in English

22:25 ... The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air (Comedy)

22:50 ...

Movie: "I Don't Buy Kisses Any More"

00:20 ... Guitar Legends

PRAYER TIMES

06:17 ... Fajr

05:43 ... (Sunrise) Dhuhr

12:32 ... Dhuhr

CHURCHES

14:12 ... 'Aur

19:22 ... Meghrib

20:00 ... 'Isha

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The Lutheran Church Tel. 624932

Church of Nazareth Tel. 675691

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 614190

English-speaking

Latin Catholic Parish Tel. 614190

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology.

It will be hot with chances of

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

scattered rains. Winds will be

northwesterly moderate. In Aqaba,

it will be partly cloudy and winds

northerly moderate.

Min./Max. temp. 15 / 28

Aqaba 18 / 33

Overcast Cals 15 / 30

Jordan Valley 16 / 32

Yesterday's high temperatures:

Amman 33, Aqaba 37 Humidity

readings: Amman 15 per cent,

Aqaba 10 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Walid Al Mami 675855

Dr. Jam' Abu Dhiab 758848

Dr. Khalil Abdo 735203

Dr. Mahmud Amer 889883

Pina pharmacy 661912

Fordons pharmacy 778336

Al Aqaba pharmacy 637655

Nasrallah pharmacy 625672

Al Salem pharmacy 626731

Yacoub pharmacy 644945

Shmeini pharmacy 637660

Najib pharmacy 847632

IRBID:

Dr. Ahmad Qam 281741

Alqada pharmacy (—)

ZARQA:

Dr. Hafez Al Salati 914144

Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111

Civil Defence Department 661111

Rescue 630341

Civil Defence Emergency 199

Roscoe Police 192, 621111, 637777

Fire Brigade 617101

Blood Bank 675121

Highway Police 843402

Traffic Police 894200

Public Security Department 63021

Hotel Complaints 605800

Price Complaints 661176

Water and Sewerage 897467

Complaints 787111

Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121

Overcast Cals 01020

Central Amman Telephone

Repairs 623101

Abdali Telephone Repairs 661101

Radio Jordan 774111

Water Television 721111

Radio Jordan 774111

Water Authority 680100

Jordan Electricity Authority 815615

Electric Power 636381

RJ Flight Information 08-53200

Queen Alia Int. Airport 08-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:

Haram Medical Centre 81381

Regent urges labour force to avail itself of training

Government says unemployment at 15%

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti deplored for His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, at a gathering of workers at the Sahab Industrial City marking Labour Day. In the Crown Prince's speech, delivered by Mr. Kabariti on Wednesday, the Regent urged the workers to seriously consider training programmes and using modern technology to help develop the country's industry.

He said Jordan's industrial institutions can only be developed through dedication, additional sacrifices and the proper employment of modern technology and the utilisation of raw materials. The Crown Prince said Jordan embarked on real development in the early 1960s when it opened the University of Jordan and later established the Higher Council for Science and Technology (HCST) which, he said, serves as the country's primary tools in its development programmes. "It is through the workers' efforts over the years that Jordan has achieved great strides in development and progress in various industrial and other fields," added the Regent.

Jordan, he said, has been true to the goals of the Great Arab Revolt, striving to achieve pan-Arab goals, and it never changed its policies "unlike other Arab states which shifted their affiliations or moved from one camp to the other and from one policy to another in the course of the past years and the developments in the Middle East region."

"Ever since its foundation, this Kingdom has been true to its pan-Arab mission and never lost faith in its Arab nation," added the Regent.

He said, "Jordan remains part of the Middle East and it will cling to its Arab identity because we continue to uphold Arabism, and remain committed to Islam as our religion." Addressing the meeting also, Minister of Labour Abdul Hafez Shakhaneh said the government has finalised a new draft law on social security which, he said, will be submitted to the legislation bureau in the coming two weeks. He said the draft law provides for further gains for Jordanian workers.

Referring to the rate of unemployment among the 930,000 national work-

force, the minister said it is estimated at 15 per cent noting that the country is trying hard to replace the 300,000 guest workers with Jordanian job-seekers by providing them with vocational training in different trades.

According to the minister, Jordan's expatriate workers are currently estimated at 300,000 whose money transfers to their homeland, he added, are helping to replenish the state treasury of foreign currency reserves and helping to adjust Jordan's balance of payments and contributing to the Kingdom's overall development.

Abdul Halim Khaddam, chairman of the Central Council of the Federation of Jordanian Labour Unions addressed the meeting, demanding that the government amend the present Social Security Law, better control the local labour market and help find jobs for Jordanians.

He also demanded that children of workers be assigned a quota of seats in state universities.

Several cabinet members and parliament deputies were among those attending the celebration.

15 people die in various incidents over holiday

By Rana Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Fifteen people died and dozens were injured in separate incidents in the Kingdom during the holiday weekend, according to Civil Defence Department (CDD) and Public Security Department (PSD) reports. In Aqaba, a 25-year-old man drowned while swimming at the Aqaba Hotel, reports said. Jamal Mohammad Kheir, was pulled from the sea but suffered a coma and died on the way to Princess Haya Hospital. In Balqa, a 17-year-old man also drowned while swimming in a pool in a public park. Mohammad Atweh was first listed in critical condition, but died shortly after arriving at Balqa Government Hospital. In another drowning incident in Irbid, a 19-year-old man died while swimming in the Yarmouk River in Karkoush area, CDD reports said. According to the report, bystanders tried to rescue the youth, Sultan Mohammad Khalaf, but he was already dead when his body was retrieved from the river. Three pedestrians, including two children were killed in road accidents,

official reports said. In Tafleh, a five-year-old child identified as Uday Salem was killed when he was run-over by a vehicle driven by Abdul Hadi Ibrahim in Ein Beidha area.

In Ramtha, Khaled Mohammad, a 10-year-old was playing in the street when he was struck by a vehicle driven by Mahmoud Ahmad, 35. A 16-year-old woman identified by police as S.S. was killed while crossing the street. She was hit by a vehicle driven by Khalid Ahmad, 25.

Police are investigating two suicide incidents that occurred in Amman during the holiday. In Sweileh, police said they were investigating the death of a man they identified only as S.H.S., who was found in his room with a gunshot wound to the stomach, PSD reports indicated.

Police said they also retrieved a hunting rifle from the room, adding that it was used in the incident. Neighbours informed the authorities that the victim was always complaining about life and often expressed suicidal tendencies.

In Amir Hassan neighbourhood, a 26-year-old shot himself in his house and left a note saying he decided to commit suicide. Police said they are investigating both incidents. The PSD reported one homicide as occurring during the holiday.

In Quarrah a man identified as H.M.M. turned himself into Shobak Police Station claiming that he killed A.S. over a land feud. Police said the matter was settled in a tribal fashion, and that they were investigating the incident.

Road accidents resulted in four deaths and injury to 17 people during the past five days, CDD and PSD reports indicated. The reports identified the deceased victims as Abdula Kader Thibian, 28, who was killed in Naour, Ahmad Khalil, 18, killed in Neimeh, Theeb Nasser, 36, killed on Aqaba Highway, and Sabri Hassan Mohammad, 70, killed in Irbid. Meanwhile, a one-and-a-half-year-old child from Marj Al Hamam and a 33-year-old man in Irbid died in falls from the balconies of their homes, the reports said.

In March last year, during Eid Al Fitr holiday, 23 people were killed, most in road accidents, and 145 people were injured in various accidents in the Kingdom.

U.S. denies French report

(Continued from page 1)

base in southern France after a mission over Bosnia and was circling "under the positive control of French air traffic controllers."

The high-altitude U-2 returned from Bosnia early because of bad weather, it said. Aircraft often circle to use up fuel that can make them too heavy to land safely.

"The U.S. has an excellent relationship with both the

government and the military of France," the U.S. military said.

French military sources told Reuters that Paris did not supply nuclear weapons components to Britain despite increased recent cooperation between western Europe's only nuclear powers in nuclear weaponry and deterrence. Liberation, quoting unde-

ntified French military sources, said the U-2 flight, at an altitude above 20,000 metres — beyond the reach of manned interceptors — was monitored by French radar controllers who challenged the pilot to explain why he was flying circles over central France.

The plane's flight path took it over a secret centre where French nuclear warheads are assembled and stocked and over Dijon airbase where RAF planes were loading. Liberation said.

French military officials said Paris had made "fraternal remarks" to U.S. authorities when U.S. planes heading for Bosnia from Britain from April 1993 onwards sometimes went into circular flying patterns over France.

"This situation was remedied and there were no further problems," a source told Reuters. One top French official told Reuters he doubted the U.S. would risk a new row with Paris over American spying on France even as French authorities tightened links with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

He added that the U.S. had, in any case, all the information it needed through spy satellites.

Troika visit to 'show support for peace process'

By Francesca Ciriaci
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A European troika will pay a two-day visit to Amman on May 5 and 6 to express the European Union's (EU) "support (for) the opening of the final phase of the peace negotiations after the bombings of the Lebanese territory and the Katyusha attacks against Israeli territory," according to a press release issued Thursday by the Italian embassy in Amman.

According to a spokesperson at the Italian embassy, the troika, headed by Italian Foreign Minister Susanna Agnelli, representing the current Italian presidency of the EU, will include Irish Foreign Minister Gay Mitchell, representing the future Irish presidency, Spanish Secretary of State Emilio Fernandez Castano,

representing the previous Spanish presidency, and Director General of the European Commission Juan Pratt.

The visit is part of a Middle East tour which starts today and will take the troika first to Cairo, then to Amman and finally to Beirut, "to reaffirm the EU's commitment for the peace process," according to the Italian embassy statement.

The Italian embassy spokesperson told the Jordan Times that, in Amman, the European troika is scheduled to meet with HRH Crown Prince Hassan and Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti.

According to the spokesperson, "the visit will have a strictly political character and is a proof of the constant dialogue between Jordan and the EU."

"Beside the revitalisation of the peace process, on the agenda of the high-level meetings scheduled here in Amman with the Jordanian government there will also be the current negotiation for the (Jordan-EU) partnership agreement," the statement said.

In addition to institutionalised cooperation in the economic, political and security sectors, the partnership agreement is meant to establish free trade between the EU and the Kingdom.

"The purpose, in this case, is to foster the dialogue between Jordan and Europe in all fields — political, economic, financial and cultural — and to increase interaction and integration," the statement said.

Mrs. Agnelli visited Israel, Lebanon and Syria two weeks ago, and

according to news agency dispatches, this fresh visit to the Middle East shows the Italian presidency's "relentless support for the promotion of the peace process on the Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian tracks."

Mrs. Agnelli's coming visit follows last Saturday's cease-fire agreed between Hizbollah and the Israeli government after 16 days of Israeli attacks against South Lebanon, and last week's Palestinian National Council's decision to abrogate articles from its charter calling for the elimination of the State of Israel.

"On the Lebanese track, the troika's visit aims at consolidating the cease-fire as a precondition to the bilateral negotiations between Syria, Lebanon and Israel, on the basis of the relevant U.N. resolutions."

Immediately after Israel's military escalation, which involved the shelling of a U.N. shelter in which nearly 100 people were killed on April 18, the EU issued several statements calling for the immediate implementation of U.N. Security Council resolution 425 and urging an end to the hostilities.

"On the Palestinian track, Europe is confident that Israel will positively respond to the recent decision of the PNC to abrogate those articles in its charter which provide for the destruction of the State of Israel," the statement said, adding that "in this connection, the EU strongly supports the end to the closure of the Palestinian territories and the implementation of the (Israeli) withdrawal from Hebron."

Panel to discuss 'relevance of non-violence to Middle East'

Exhibition, film to feature Gandhi

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies and the Indian Cultural Association in coordination with the Indian Embassy in Amman will present an exhibition of Gandhi's original photographs from May 5 to 7, and a screening of British film director Sir Richard Attenborough's Oscar-winning film "Gandhi" at the Royal Cultural Centre (RCC) today (May 4) and tomorrow (May 5) at 7:00 p.m., according to the institute.

The statement said that the film showings and the exhibition are open to the public.

Also, on Sunday (May 5), a panel discussion entitled, "The Relevance of Non-Violence to the Contemporary Middle East," will be held from 9:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the RCC, the statement said.

According to Institute spokesperson Randa Sali, the speakers on the panel are former Minister of Information Mahmoud Sharif, Indian Pro-



Ben Kingsley as Gandhi

fessor Ravinder Kumar, a specialist on non-violence and director of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Indian Ambassador to Jordan Gajanan Wankar and South African Ambassador Henry De Bruyn.

Ms. Sali said the sessions will be moderated by former Royal Cultural Centre Director Iyad Qattan and Shariq Ben Razza, scholar in peace research and non-violence.

EXHIBITIONS

Original photographs of Gandhi and his family, including his wife Kasturba, will be on display at the Royal Cultural Centre, Amman, from May 5 to 7.

SCREENINGS

The Oscar-winning film "Gandhi" will be screened at the Royal Cultural Centre, Amman, on May 4 and 5 at 7:00 p.m.

PANEL DISCUSSION

A panel discussion entitled "The Relevance of Non-Violence to the Contemporary Middle East" will be held at the Royal Cultural Centre, Amman, on Sunday, May 5, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Emile Habibi laid to rest

(Continued from page 12)

award in 1992.

But his acceptance of the prize from hard-line Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir angered colleagues throughout the Arab World, and he donated the 8,000 prize money to a charity working with Palestinian children injured by Israeli troops during the intifada.

Mr. Darwish, who later resigned from the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) Executive Committee in protest at the signing of the autonomy accords with Israel, was among Habibi's fiercest critics at the time.

The book, which portrays the trauma experienced by

Palestinians who witnessed the flight and expulsion of most of their people with the creation of Israel in 1948, was translated into 12 languages.

Several of the mourners said that Habibi had wanted inscribed on his gravestone "he remained in Haifa."

Wadiah Ilamy, a mourner from Nazareth, told AFP: "In 1948 Habibi went around telling people to stay and not to leave and that he and the communist party wanted the Arabs to accept the partition."

"At first people said he was a traitor but now the whole world agrees with this position."

Iraqi group plans newspaper

(Continued from page 12)

distribute it in all cities inside Iraq. We have made all the necessary arrangements to make it available to the Iraqis living in Iraq," Mr. Mohammad said.

He said his movement rejects any foreign assistance in its struggle to topple the Iraqi regime and strives to ignite "an internal change" in his

country. "Through the paper we want to convey a message to the Iraqi people and tell them that change is the responsibility of all Iraqis and that we need their support to make it happen and we are confident that our people will move very soon," Mr. Mohammad said.

Citing his own military re-

Experts to delve into journalism in relation to governing laws

AMMAN (Petra) — The country's laws on Press and Publication and the Jordan Press Association (JPA) will be among several topics to come under scrutiny during a two-day seminar opening today at the Royal Cultural Centre (RCC) Saturday under the patronage of HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent.

Organised by the Jordanian and Islamic Centres for Studies and Information in cooperation with the Amman Municipality, participants will discuss various aspects of the work of the media and of the official information services in Jordan, according to a statement issued by the organisers Friday.

On the first day, the opening session will be chaired by Abdul Raouf Rawabdeh, chairman of

the Lower House of Parliament's Judiciary Committee; the second session will be chaired by Hisham Tell, Minister of State for Prime Ministry Affairs and will tackle a working paper by Nael Abdul Rahman of the University of Jordan on media legislation and another paper by Amin Adaleh of Muta University on media censorship.

The papers will also focus on the practice of journalism in relation and accordance to the Jordanian Constitution, the Press and Publication Law and the Jordan Press Association Law.

According to the statement, the second day's meeting begins with a session chaired by Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament Saad Hayel Srour and will review a paper by Minister of

Information Marwan Muasher on the concepts of media management and plans for abolishing the Ministry of Information.

Mahmoud Kayed, chairman of the board of directors of the Jordan Press Foundation, will submit a paper tackling the difference between managing a newspaper and a government information institution.

Senator Laila Sharaf will chair the second session on Sunday during which three working papers will be reviewed. They are: the journalism profession, developments in the media over the past years, and the training of journalists and sources of information.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Yanal Hikmat appointed senator

AMMAN (PETRA) — A Royal Decree was issued Thursday endorsing the appointment of Yanal Hikmat, a former minister of tourism and advisor to His Majesty King Hussein, as a member of the Upper House of Parliament. Mr. Hikmat takes the seat left vacant by the death last week of Izzedin Mufli.

Experts to discuss Arab economies

AMMAN (PETRA) — A four-day economic conference will be held in Amman starting on May 26, with representatives of several Arab and foreign countries attending. The conference, organised by the Urdan Al Jadid Centre in cooperation with Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Philadelphia University, will discuss such issues as Arab economies, the future Jordanian economy in light of international and regional changes and the economic relations with Palestine and Israel. Participants will also discuss 16 major working papers. Also, in a roundtable, 15 Arab and international economic experts will discuss future challenges facing Arab economies.

Higher court judge to head for Cairo meeting

AMMAN (PETRA) — Higher Court of Justice Judge Fahd Abu Ithem leaves for Cairo today at the head of an expert Jordanian group to take part in the week-long meetings of Arab specialists entrusted with working out the final draft of an Arab convention on preventing all forms and aspects of extremism and terrorism. The draft will be presented to the Council of Arab Ministers of Justice. Taking part in the conference, which starts in Cairo on Sunday, will be legal experts from 10 Arab countries in addition to specialists from the Council of Arab Interior Ministers and the Arab League's general secretariat.

Workshop to look into deep water wells

AMMAN (PETRA) — A three-day regional workshop, which starts here today, will review means of integrating information on drilling oil and gas wells and the hydrology of deep water wells. The workshop, organised by the Islamic Network for Developing And Managing Water Sources and the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, aims to facilitate the exchange of experience between experts in oil-well drilling and those interested in deep water wells hydrology. Taking part in the workshop will be 30 participants from 7 countries who will discuss 25 working papers covering ground water in Jordan and the changes in the quality of deep ground water reservoirs in the southern and central parts of Jordan, current water problems in the Middle East, drilling techniques and the technical problems experienced when drilling deep water wells.

Aideed must be defeated — rival

(Continued from page 12)

Last month a meeting of five pro-Ato groups in Nairobi agreed on a three-stage return to central government and the introduction of Islamic Sharia law.

"Mostly, I agree with their proposals, but I must consult with Ato himself," Mr. Ali Mahdi said. "The only person who refuses to settle the Somali problem by dialogue is Aideed."

Aideed supporters elected him president last year and he refuses to negotiate, saying that he is president of all Somalia and as such the other factions should come under his control.

But Gen. Aideed's claim to the presidency is not accepted by the rival faction groups. Citing his own military re-

ports, Mr. Ali Mahdi said Gen. Aideed launched four abortive attacks against positions held by Mr. Ato in the south since April 4 and said Gen. Aideed was losing the war militarily and politically.

There is some evidence to support his claim. Independent analysts say Gen. Aideed's grip on Merca port and inland Baidoa is weakening. Somalia sources based in the south say Gen. Aideed's militia are also suffering morale and salary problems.

The new frontline positions in south Mogadishu run roughly along a southeast axis down Afgoye road with Mr. Ato's forces occupying well-defended positions around the former U.S. embassy and Somali National University.

Mr. Ato's rear lines form a common border with Medina district occupied by Musa Sudi, an Ato ally. Fears have been raised that rather than launch a frontal assault across Afgoye road, Gen. Aideed may try to attack through Medina. Mr. Ali Mahdi warned that any Aideed assault on Medina would be folly.

"He (Aideed) cannot even think of that. If he would do that it would be suicide. Sudi is one of our parties, he comes under our protection," said Mr. Mahdi.

Somalia has been without central government since 1991 when rebels overthrew the late President Mohamed Siad Barre.

Rival clan chiefs jockeying for power, soon turned their guns on each other in battles that killed 30,000, Somalis while 300,000 perished in a war-induced famine.

Eritrea, Yemen disagree

(Continued from page 1)

that "Yemen would certainly accept that."

He said Yemen had not ruled out France taking up the position of the third judge "if both parties agree, because France — through its sense of justice and the initiatives it has already undertaken — is qualified to do so."

Mr. Gamil said no deadline had been fixed for the court's work, but he said a time frame "of six months would be reasonable."

Mr. Kikla said the arbitration agreement would be signed in Paris within the

next two weeks in the presence of the United Nations secretary general and the foreign ministers of France, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Yemen.

The status of the chain of nine islands, which used to be part of the Ottoman empire, has never been settled by international convention.

They guard the Bab Al Mandab straits at the southern entrance to the Red Sea. The islands are also close to Djibouti where France has a large military base designed to protect Red Sea shipping routes.

'Russia ready for Chechenya talks'

STRASBOURG, France (R) — Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov said Friday his government was ready to launch wide-ranging talks with Chechen rebels "as soon as they have a representative."

"Everything is negotiable, all questions can be put on the table, including any kind of status for Chechenya", Mr. Primakov told reporters at a two-day meeting in Strasbourg of foreign ministers from the 39 members of the Council of Europe.

"Following the death of Dudayev, there is a sort of uncertainty prevailing in Chechenya", Mr. Primakov said, referring to separatist leader Dzhokhar Dudayev killed in a rocket attack on April 11.

"As soon as we see clearly that the other side has been represented, we will be entering into contacts with that side. Represented means representing the people who are fighting the federal forces," Mr. Primakov added.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin said Thursday he planned to visit breakaway Chechenya later this month and was even ready to meet separatist rebels, Interfax News Agency said.

The report confirmed an earlier suggestion that the 65-year-old Kremlin leader could make his first trip to the north Caucasus region, scene of a bloody separatist conflict, before the Russian presidential election on June 16.

"The solution will not depend on just one side. We will try to exploit every opportunity. The dividing line in that republic is not only between the federal forces and the Dudayev gunmen, but also within the Chechen population," Mr. Primakov said.

New Chechen rebel leader Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev said Wednesday he was ready for talks with Moscow to end the bloodshed in the region — if Russian troops were withdrawn.

Mr. Yandarbiyev said Russia would have to treat the Chechen side with respect and stop using expressions like "criminals", "bandit formations" and "terrorists" — phrases habitually used by the Russian leadership and military alike.

He also said the meeting would have to take place on the basis of a "real wish to create peace in Chechenya and not to make propagandist acts in the pre-election period".

Russia in late February joined the Council of Europe in a symbolic sign of the end of the cold war, despite unease about Moscow's human rights record.

The council was set up in 1949 to promote democracy and human rights in West Europe against the then-Communist East. Russia also pledged to suspend the death penalty immediately and to abolish it within three years, but Mr. Primakov cautioned: "We are committed to the obligation to do away with capital punishment. But this is not yet the time to do this."

President Boris Yeltsin said Friday he would invite Chechen guerrilla field commanders to join in negotiations with Russia and the Russian-backed Chechen government which could begin before June presidential elections.

"Since Dudayev is gone, we need to work with the field commanders," ITAR-TASS news agency quoted Mr. Yeltsin as saying during a campaign stop in the town of Yaroslavl, 250 kilometres northeast of Moscow.

Mr. Yeltsin, who announced a peace initiative for Chechenya on March 31, had previously agreed to hold talks with Mr. Dudayev through intermediaries.

"When I go to Chechenya, I will announce that three sides will sit at the negotiating table — the (Moscow-backed Doku) Zavgayev government, Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin's government commission and the third side — field commanders who of course want to participate in the negotiating process," Mr. Yeltsin said.

"I hope that negotiations can proceed before the elections," he said.

Mr. Yeltsin, who plans to visit Chechenya in mid-May, did not say which field commanders might take part in the talks. Previous peace talks last year involved rebel chief of staff Aslan Maskhadov.

Bangladesh opposition leader wins over former generals

DHAKA (R) — The electoral hopes of Bangladesh's opposition leader Sheikh Hasina have been boosted by the decision of some 14 prominent figures, some of them ex-military chiefs, to join her camp, political analysts said Friday.

They said the move dispelled lingering popular perceptions that Mrs. Hasina, whose own family were killed by troops 21 years ago, was implacably opposed to the powerful military.

"This heavyweight support gives a tremendous boost to Mrs. Hasina's leadership and will spruce up her image ahead of the elections," said Matru Rahman Chowdhury, editor of the daily Bangladesh Patrika newspaper.

Mrs. Hasina led a successful opposition campaign to boycott elections held in February and force the resignation of Begum Khaleda Zia, who eventually stepped down on March 30.

A caretaker government has since run the country ahead of fresh parliamentary polls due to be held on June 12.

Retired Lieutenant-General Nooruddin Khan, Bangladesh's last army chief of staff, pledged his allegiance to Mrs. Hasina late Thursday, a day after she returned from the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca.

Others who formally joined her party included retired Air Vice-Marshal A.K. Khandaker, former paramilitary chief Major-General Badruzzaman and Nure

Alam Siddiqui, one of Bangladesh's top businessmen, former student leader and fiery orator.

All said they believed Mrs. Hasina would be able to lead the country out of decades-old political gridlock and economic stagnation by following the footsteps of her father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh's independence leader.

Mujib, also the country's first president, was killed in a 1975 army coup along with most of his family. Mrs. Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana were overseas at the time.

Mrs. Hasina greeted the new entrants to her Awami League and sought their wholehearted support and guidance in an electoral battle against Mrs. Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

Analysts said Mrs. Hasina's new support helped to dispel a widely held perception that the armed forces did not like her.

"If the army did not like Hasina while they were in service there can be no reasonable grounds why they should now develop a liking for her in retirement," one analyst said. Another former army chief, Lieutenant-General K.M. Shafulullah, joined Mrs. Hasina's party late last year.

Nearly half of Bangladesh's 115 million people are expected to be eligible to vote for candidates contesting 300 parliamentary seats in the June poll.

Landmine pact to go ahead after Pakistan backs down

GENEVA (R) — Delegates from 55 countries prepared Friday to adopt a pact tightening up rules on anti-personnel (AP) landmines after Pakistan dropped a demand for a key article of the accord to be reworded, diplomats said.

The pact, a revision of the 1980 conventional weapons convention, will outlaw the most dangerous "dumb" or undetectable AP mines and place restrictions on other types to prevent them becoming hidden killers.

But campaigners for a total ban on the weapons, now supported by more than 30 governments, dismissed the pact as not going nearly far enough.

"It's just what we expected — very, very weak and very, very modest," said an official from the International Committee of the Red Cross. "It's totally inadequate."

More than 100 million mines already lie hidden in 64 countries including Mozambique, Afghanistan and Cambodia. According to U.N. estimates they main or kill some 25,000 people a year, many of them children at play or farmers at work.

The new pact will do nothing for those people, but conference Chairman Johan Molander of Sweden said earlier this week that it would, if applied, save "many, many lives".

Mr. Molander's own government proposed an outright ban two years ago, but without success. Many governments, including major powers such as Russia, India, China and the United States, say they

still need landmines to protect international borders.

The treaty outlaws undetectable mines and insists that all AP mines carry eight grammes of iron or the equivalent to make them detectable. Detectable mines can be used, for example along borders, as long as they are fenced off, marked and guarded.

The treaty places tighter restrictions on remotely-delivered landmines — modern munitions which can be scattered by the thousand via artillery shell or helicopter far from front lines.

Those mines will have to self-destruct within 30 days with 90 per cent reliability and self-deactivate within 120 with 99.9 per cent reliability — targets that many delegates concede are unrealistic in conflict situations.

The scope of the new pact is extended to include internal as well as international conflicts and places restrictions for the first time on "transfer" of mines. AP mines can only be imported or exported by recognised states or their designated agents.

Pakistan Wednesday shocked delegates by demanding that the article on transfers be rewritten to make clear that it is in accord with the principles of the United Nations Charter.

That charter guarantees the right to self-defence and to self-determination. European Union delegations immediately rejected Pakistan's demand, saying that it would weaken the treaty.



Indian voters line up in long queues to cast their votes in the second phase of polling at Moradabad in India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh. Indians will be voting for 204 parliamentary seats, with polling staggered over six days and ending on May 30 (Reuters photo)

India's BJP rules out 'horse trading' to win power

NEW DELHI (R) — India's main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), tipped to win the most seats in a hung parliament after elections now under way, said Friday it would not buy off lawmakers to cobble together a majority.

"There is no question of buying members of parliament. I am determined to come to power without compromising my principles," BJP's prime ministerial candidate, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, told the Pioneer in an interview published Friday.

"Our course of action will depend on the nature of the mandate," BJP President Lal Krishna Advani was quoted as saying in the western city of Pune. But he ruled out "horse trading" in a quest to form India's first-ever BJP government.

Opinion polls predict the Hindu nationalist BJP will get between 190 and 215 seats in the general election for the 545-member lower house, or Lok Sabha.

This is in contrast to earlier opinion polls. A survey by Dun and Bradstreet Marketing Research PVT in late March projected Congress as the winner with the BJP second.

The first round of voting in the six-phase general elections took place on April 27 for 150 seats. Balloting for 204 more took place Thursday and the

third phase is set for May 7. Counting starts the next day and results from all but six constituencies should be known by May 11.

Officials called the voting relatively peaceful, and the turnout impressive, considering the low-key nature of the campaign. Strong checks on expenditure limits by the independent Election Commission have toned down the colour and largesse that have marked previous polls.

Seven people were killed Thursday and officials estimated that 50 to 60 per cent of the 220 million people entitled to vote cast their ballots in the scorching heat Thursday.

About 300 people died during the last general election in 1991. About 50 have been killed this year.

Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's Congress Party is predicted to get no more than 190 seats even by its strategists.

Senior leaders were expecting the top-level Congress Working Committee to meet on May 9, when trends should be clear.

They were expected to try to push Congress towards a coalition to keep out the BJP, perceived as having a bias against India's 110 million Muslims.

The balance of power is expected to lie with leftist and regional groups, many of them tied up in an alliance

with the Communists under the National Front-Left Front (NF-LF) banner.

Analysts say much will depend on whether the BJP and Congress woo splinter regional groups or the NF-LF.

NF-LF leaders hope Mr. Rao's party will split and that some of its members will join them in a coalition.

The arrest Thursday in a cheating case of controversial Hindu guru, Chandraswami, alleged by the opposition to be a friend of Mr. Rao's, only added to the Congress Party's low morale.

Mr. Rao has campaigned for reelection on a platform of stability, emphasising the short lifespans of two previous leftist governments.

He is worried over the rise of the BJP, which won 120 seats in 1991 on a campaign to build a temple at the site of a disputed mosque in the northern Indian city of Ayodhya. Some 3,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed in communal riots after the mosque was razed by Hindu extremists in 1992.

"Party is a big word which means discipline, order and the will to uphold a set of values," Mr. Rao was quoted by the Press Trust of India as saying in the eastern city of Ranchi.

"The Congress has an obvious edge over the parties which have been projecting themselves as alternatives."

Taiwan seeks 'new path' to end China stalemate

TAIPEI (R) — Taiwan expressed regret Friday over China's rebuff of its latest initiative to end a festering stalemate and urged its Communist rival to embark on a "new path" towards renewed talks and better ties.

"The Chinese Communists are conjuring up too many obstacles so it is impossible to push ahead with high-level meetings and visits," Premier and Vice President-Elect Lien Chan told reporters in Taipei.

Mr. Lien rejected Beijing's contention that his Nationalist government was to blame for a 10-month freeze in ties across the Taiwan Strait, saying Taipei "does not rule out the possibility of a high-level meeting".

Spokesman Kao Koon-Lian of Taiwan's policy-making Mainland Affairs Council said the island's people should be patient.

"I hope our countrymen can treat relations across the Taiwan Strait with patience. Relations cannot be improved based on our wishful thinking," Mr. Kao said. "We have done everything we can."

China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait said in a letter Thursday to its Taiwan counterpart, the Straits Exchange Foundation, that the "political reason that led to...meetings being halted is known to all".

China in mid-1995 broke off what up to then had been two years of promising talks, slamming Taiwan President Lee Teng-Hui's private but high-profile June visit to the United States an intolerable grab for Taiwan independence.

Only when Taiwan halts activities seen by China as seeking independence can talks resume, Beijing officials say. China has pushed to isolate and eventually win over Taiwan since 1949, when the Communist's civil-war victory sent the defeated Nationalists into exile on the island.

Mainland Affairs Council Chairman Chang King-Yuh appealed yet again for Beijing to end the impasse.

"I deeply regret that people at the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait cannot realise that both sides should return to the negotiating channel," he said.

"I hope Communist China can strike out on a new path, consider the common welfare of people across the Taiwan Strait and resume negotiations."

Low-level contacts across the Taiwan Strait have quietly continued despite the high-level acrimony.

The Straits Exchange Foundation's Culture Department chief left Friday for Beijing for a six-day exchange — the first department head to visit China since late 1995.

Taiwan, whose democratic reforms resulted on March 23 in the first popular presidential election in Chinese history, calls itself the Republic of China and espouses reunification — but only through mainland-wide multiparty elections.

Voters handed incumbent Lee Teng-Hui a resounding mandate despite months of anti-Lee vitriol by China and its staging of intimidating war games and unarmed missile tests in waters near Taiwan in the weeks before the election.

Taiwan wants less hostile ties with China, where 25,000 Taiwan firms have invested a total of \$25 billion, but is unwilling to sacrifice its goal of a higher global profile.

"We will not give up our right to participate in international activities just because we want to resume technical negotiations or keep the channels open between the two sides," Straits Exchange Foundation Secretary General Chiao Jen-Ho said Friday.

Deadlock remains in S. African basic law talks

CAPE TOWN (AFP) — South African lawmakers remained deadlocked Friday in their efforts to hammer out a consensus on a new constitution as the chances of meeting a May 8 deadline grew slimmer by the hour.

Weakly constitution writers failed to meet an 11:00 a.m. (0900 GMT) deadline they had set for themselves to wind up their negotiations on three outstanding issues in the basic law.

Leon Wessels of the National Party, deputy chairman of the Constitutional Assembly, said a meeting of the Constitutional Committee — the assembly's negotiating forum — had been called on schedule, but there was nothing new to report.

"Consultations are in progress and have reached a very delicate phase," he said, adding that the bells in parliament would start ringing to alert members to a meeting within five minutes once negotiators indicated they had something to report.

The ruling African National Congress (ANC) and its chief rival and coalition partner, the National Party (NP), are trying to agree on three key issues: The right to property, the right of employers to lock their workers out and the right of schools to use a single language as a medium of education.

The Constitutional Assembly — made up of all 490 members of the two houses of parliament — has set itself May 8 as a deadline to adopt the new basic law.

An NP official said privately Thursday that his party simply needed more time, suggesting that talks with the ANC could continue over the weekend with any agreement endorsed at a meeting Monday morning.

But assembly officials protested that for the bill to be on time for submission to the chamber Monday afternoon, it would have to be at the printers' no later than 7:00 p.m. (1700 GMT) Sunday.

Technical experts still have much work to do over the weekend to clean up the language of the bill, which would then have to be translated into Afrikaans and at least one other language, the officials said.

But parliamentarians insist that the Constitutional Assembly, being an entirely new body, can make up its rules as it goes along and that they can submit amendments at any time before the final vote, where the bill must obtain a two-thirds majority.

If it fails to do so, the deadlock-breaking mechanisms to come into play include a 30-day cooling off period, during which experts will try to work out a compromise likely to obtain the required majority.

If that too fails, a national referendum would be called and, possibly, new general elections.

It appeared clear from statements by ANC officials Thursday that a settlement on the property clause could be easily available, and a wording seemed to have been found to end the impasse on the lockout provision.

Willie Hofmeyr, a top ANC negotiator, said that although the proposed solution to the lockout would leave all sides fairly unhappy, "it will be something we could live with."

The main sticking point continues to be the education clause.

The ANC has accused the NP of wanting to perpetuate apartheid by using the clause to deny access to white schools by blacks refusing to use Afrikaans.

New sun satellite sends back revealing images

PARIS (AFP) — Starting new images of the sun, including the ejection of huge clouds of gas, are being transmitted back to Earth by a sophisticated European satellite launched in December. The pictures taken by instruments aboard the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO) were presented Thursday at the headquarters of the European Space Agency (ESA) here. ESA head of scientific programmes Roger Bonnet said that the nine European and three American instruments aboard were working perfectly and SOHO was in its planned orbit, at the exact point where the gravities of the sun and the Earth cancel each other out. Though the sun was supposedly in the quietest period of its 11-year cycle of activity, it was still emitting huge quantities of gas, weighing billions of tonnes, at a speed of 550 kilometres a second. Apart from learning more of the workings of a star like the sun, SOHO's observations are expected to improve the forecasting of weather on Earth.

The SOHO satellite was launched in December. The pictures taken by instruments aboard the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO) were presented Thursday at the headquarters of the European Space Agency (ESA) here.

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A young woman holds on to her mother as a bullet is extracted from her leg at a makeshift hospital in the Barclay Training Centre. Over 75 people have been wounded and 20 have died during recent heavy fighting which erupted in the capital (Reuters photo)

Liberia's Taylor stands ground against Krahn

MONROVIA (R) — Charles Taylor, who started Liberia's civil war more than six years ago, appears determined to pursue his campaign against his Krahn foes to the end.

The Krahn, for their part, are cooperating with mediators, while bringing in reinforcements from the east.

Mr. Taylor said in a radio address Thursday there would be no ceasefire until Krahn leader Roosevelt Johnson surrendered.

"We will arrest this situation by the weekend and Liberians can be able to bring their lives back to normal," Mr. Taylor said.

Diplomatic sources said Krahn negotiators had told West African and U.N. mediators at the U.S. embassy they would be willing to observe a ceasefire.

Battles reached a stalemate at two fronts.

Krahn fighters from the Barclay Training Centre (BTC) army barracks faced off against Mr. Taylor's men on the Johnson Street Bridge connecting the city centre to Bushrod Island.

In the eastern suburbs, Krahn reinforcements found their advance blocked just before the Paynesville road junction.

"Diplomatic efforts are focusing on halting the fighting long enough to get the combatants to a West African summit in Ghana Wednesday, though U.S. Assistant Secretary of State George Moose returned to Washington Wednesday after failing to see Mr. Taylor or Alhaji Kromah, Mr. Taylor's

former vice-chairman on the ruling Council of State.

Mr. Taylor launched the civil war by invading from Ivory Coast on Christmas Eve, 1989, and tried to take the capital in 1990 and in 1992.

This time he has the advantage of being already in the city, as a vice-chairman of the six-member council, which was set up under a peace accord signed in Nigeria last August.

The Abuja Accord differed from previous peace deals by directly involving the faction leaders in the interim government, but the latest fighting has shown that it is Mr. Taylor who holds all the power on the council.

Its Chairman Wilton Sankawulo has no powerbase, civilian representative Oscar Quiah went for medical treatment in Ghana, traditional chief

Tamba Tailor is more than 90 years old and Liberia Peace Council militia leader George Boley, a Krahn, left with his family when fighting began.

Mr. Kromah, frequently Mr. Taylor's rival but his ally so far in the present conflict, left Monrovia Thursday for Suehn, 40 kilometres north of the city. Aides said he was fetching reinforcements.

"We are going to clean up all around the BTC, block by block, street by street, house by house, before we storm the barracks," Mr. Taylor told his KISS FM radio.

The Krahn dominated the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), the former national army which disintegrated at the height of the civil war following

the killing of Krahn President Samuel Doe.

The current fighting is the first in the city centre since 1990 and has been accompanied by the worst looting Monrovia has seen. Shops and homes have been stripped of everything of value and gunmen are racing around the city in stolen aid vehicles painted with the names of their combat units.

Battles in the city first began on April 6 after the Council of State tried to arrest Mr. Johnson for murder. Mr. Taylor says he is determined to bring Mr. Johnson to justice.

A 10-day truce collapsed Monday when Mr. Taylor went to the Executive Mansion, the presidential complex, with his fighters, and was forced to flee with Mr. Sankawulo under a hail of gunfire.

Rival gunmen fought from block to block in downtown Monrovia Friday, as fighters loyal Mr. Taylor made a fresh assault on their Krahn foes in the main army barracks, witnesses said.

About 50 fighters of Mr. Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia massed at the Ambassador Hotel in the city's Mamba Point district to attack the Barclay Training Centre.

Small units of Krahn, who are less well armed but employ highly effective snipers, headed out from the barracks to engage their attackers.

Thick black smoke billowed from buildings hit by rocket-propelled grenades, and civilians fled the fighting carrying bundles of belongings on their heads.

British Conservatives drubbed in local elections

LONDON (R) — Prime Minister John Major Friday insisted his Conservatives could clinch a fifth consecutive general election victory despite his ruling party winning the support of just one in four voters in town hall polls.

The Conservatives lost almost 600 local council seats, about half those they were defending in the most important test of voter sentiment before the next election, due by May 1997.

Labour polled 43 per cent of the vote in Thursday's elections for 3,000 local councillors across England outside London, with the Conservatives polling 27 per cent and the minority Liberal Democrats 26 per cent, according to independent estimates.

With most results in, the Conservatives said they calculated they had lost 575 of the just under 1,200 seats they had been defending, and had won control of just three of the 148 councils which have so far declared their results.

On the London Stock market, the FTSE 100 index of leading shares was down almost one per cent by late morning, but brokers said the dip was in part a reaction to a lower New York market Thursday. The pound's value was barely moved by the results.

Conservatives acknowledged the results were poor but said they were an improvement on disastrous 1995 town hall results and nowhere near the "meltdown" some analysts had predicted.

Party leaders said there was now no doubt that Mr. Major, under almost constant attack for weak leadership and a series of policy failures, would lead the Conservatives into the election.

Mr. Major has vowed to leave calling the next general election until the last possible moment to allow improving economic conditions to impress voters. He was defiant despite the 12 per cent swing to Labour compared with the 1992 election result.

"Over the next few months, Labour will be forced to reveal how they will pay for their policies. And when the voters compare their policies with ours, we will win the next general election," Mr. Major said.

Mr. Major said the results underlined the need for

Conservatives to concentrate on selling its policies rather than fighting internally about the direction of the party.

"We have got to work that much harder to make sure voters realise what is at stake," he said. Mr. Major has faced virulent attack from right-wingers unhappy about closer ties with the European Union.

Opposition parties said the town hall polls had underlined that the Conservatives were set to lose office nationally for the first time since 1979. No British party has ever bounced back from an opinion poll deficit of 20 percentage points to win an election 12 months later.

Labour leader Tony Blair hailed the results as spectacularly good and said they showed the Conservatives were "weak and drifting". "I doubt that Mr. Major, on the basis of these results, will want to have a general election. So they will try and stagger on," he told reporters.

Labour needs a 4.3 per cent voter swing to win the general election. Mr. Major has a majority of just one in parliament and may be forced into an early election if any Conservative MPs die in office and the party loses subsequent by-elections.

"I take some encouragement from last night's results. They continue the steady recovery that we have been engaged in for the past 12 to 18 months," said Conservative Party Chairman Brian Mawhinney. "The Labour Party has peaked too soon and has nowhere to go but down."

The BBC calculated that if the results were reflected in a general election, Mr. Blair would have an overall majority of 137 seats in the 659-member House of Commons, with the Conservatives being reduced to a dispirited band of 148 MPs.

"Let's be honest — these are pretty appalling results," said Conservative legislator Sir George Gardiner, a leading right-wing critic of major.

The Times described the results as "a dreadful showing which leaves the Tories in dire straits". Bookmakers cut the odds on a Labour victory at the general election to 1/5 from 2/9, their lowest since 1979.

Communists confirm backing for Italian government

ROME (R) — Italy's Communist Refoundation party confirmed Friday that it would help vote a centre-left government into office following a general election that gave it the balance of power in the lower house of parliament.

"The issue of the government is now fully resolved," party leader Fausto Bertinotti said after talks with Romano Prodi, head of the centre-left Olive Tree Bloc and Italy's effective prime minister-in-waiting.

"We will provide our votes to give birth to the government and the prime minister and the government will express appreciation for the role of Communist Refoundation, given the need for our support," Mr. Bertinotti told reporters.

The meeting was Mr. Bertinotti's first with Mr. Prodi since the Olive Tree, dominated by the ex-Communist Democratic Party of the Left, triumphed over Silvio Berlusconi's centre-right Freedom Alliance in the April 21 election.

The election, which set the left on the road to power in Italy for the first time, gave the Olive Tree control of the

315-member upper Senate but left it short of a majority in the Chamber of Deputies with 284 of the 630 seats.

Communist Refoundation won 35 seats in the lower house, securing the balance of power.

Mr. Prodi, all but certain to be asked by President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro to form a government later this month, needs to win a vote of confidence from both houses of parliament.

The Olive Tree and Communist Refoundation struck a pact for the election, under which they backed each other's candidates in constituencies, but differ radically on economic policy.

Strains in the relationship emerged this week after Mr. Prodi discounted his dependence on the Marxist-inspired party, which has already made clear it will not join his government.

"Look, in the Senate I don't need their votes, and in the other chamber the Communist Refoundation has no interest in trying to block me and it has nowhere else to go," Mr. Prodi was quoted as saying in Monday's International Herald Tribune.

Tamil Tiger boat attack kills seven in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO (AFP) — Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas blasted a navy boat, killing at least seven men taking alms to leprosy patients during the country's holiest Buddhist ceremony, officials here said.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam exploded a mine planted on the jetty of the small islet of Manthivu in the eastern district of Batticaloa as troops brought lunch for the hospitals' inmates, the Defence Ministry said.

The bodies of four airmen and a civilian passenger have been found but two others were missing after the surprise attack on Wesak Day, the most important Buddhist ceremony in the country, the ministry said.

It said the 43 leprosy patients were not affected by the bomb attack and security forces went ahead with the presentation despite the attack.

Military sources said the troops were an easy target for the Tigers because they made the visit to the temple on every Wesak Day as well as on every full moon day of the month which is also a Buddhist holiday.

The Wesak, however, is the most important of them all and is considered a very blessed day for Sri Lanka's majority Buddhists who believe that the Buddha was born, attained enlightenment and passed away on the same day.

The sale of meat, fish and liquor is banned during the Wesak celebrations which last for two days.

Wesak is marked in most parts of the country with huge paintings of the Buddha and his life and illuminated with

blue, green, red, orange, purple and white — the colours of the Buddhist flag.

The latest attack by the LTTE, whose members are mostly Hindus, came a day after the Tigers hijacked a civilian bus in the neighbouring district of Ampara and shot dead an off duty policeman and kidnapped two others, the Defence Ministry said Friday.

Tiger rebels later set fire to the bus but the whereabouts of the two captives was not immediately known.

In another incident in the east, security forces ambushed a group of Tamil Tigers, killing three rebels Wednesday. Troops recovered two automatic assault rifles and radio equipment from the victims, the ministry said.

The sporadic clashes in the east of the country came as security forces consolidated their gains in the northern Jaffna peninsula after driving out the Tigers who had once ruled the region with an iron fist.

Following the army's latest drive launched on April 19, some 250,000 Tamil civilians who fled the area have returned to their homes forcing the government to call for international help to resettle the refugees.

For its part, the Tigers have accused security forces of attacks against civilians and called for foreign mediation to arrange a truce with security forces, a call rejected by the government as "irrelevant".

More than 50,000 people have died in the LTTE's protracted homeland struggle in the past 23 years.

Battle lines being drawn between Clinton and Dole

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The issues could be the minimum wage, gasoline taxes, or product liability legislation, but the real battle is between President Bill Clinton and his Republican challenger Senator Bob Dole.

While the campaigning has not yet begun — Mr. Clinton has yet to even formally announce he is running for reelection — the two likely candidates are parrying over legislative issues they can exploit for political advantage.

Sen. Dole remains the decided underdog. A poll published Wednesday showed the Republican with only 37 per cent of support compared to 58 per cent for Mr. Clinton, who has succeeded in painting Sen. Dole's party as extremist.

And economic news, such as Thursday's release of figures showing the U.S. economy grew by a healthy 2.8 per cent in the first quarter, continues to help Mr. Clinton.

"We found that the American economy is continuing to grow steadily and without inflation and better than had been expected," Mr. Clinton said. "But... we know that if we want to continue this, we have got to finish the work of balancing the budget."

On the other side is Sen. Dole, who cannot currently turn the economic figures to his advantage.

So the veteran senator has tried to shift the focus to his turf — Congress. But he has even had trouble in that setting even though Republicans are in control.

Mr. Clinton Thursday vetoed a Republican-sponsored bill limiting punitive damages to \$250,000 in product liability lawsuits — a measure that Sen. Dole trumpeted as a way to cut costs to consumers.

It was Mr. Clinton's 15th veto, only one of which has been overturned.

Both men claimed to have the higher ground on the issue and blamed the other for caving in to special interests — Sen. Dole said trial lawyers were "calling the shots at the White House," while Mr. Clinton said the bill would hinder Americans who sought to "recover fully when they are injured by defective products."

With the help of his Democratic allies in Congress, Mr. Clinton has put Sen. Dole on the defensive, in particular with a theme that has resonated outside Washington — increasing the minimum wage from \$4.25 to \$5.15 an hour.

Polls have shown the public overwhelmingly in favour of such an increase.

Russia: Baltic military threat excluded

STOCKHOLM (Agencies) — Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin said Friday he did not believe the Baltic states would join NATO but ruled out any military action against them if they did.

"We are categorically against the expansion of NATO (eastwards)," Mr. Chernomyrdin said, adding that he had raised what he called mistreatment of Russians in Estonia and Latvia during talks with Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson.

But Mr. Chernomyrdin, en route to a summit of countries bordering the Baltic Sea, distanced himself from a headline Russian think-tank calling for a pre-emptive strike against the Baltic states by Russian Armed Forces if they get into NATO.

The document by Russian defence analyst Anton Surikov has been published in several Russian newspapers and has alarmed the Baltic states, which gained independence from the then Soviet Union in 1991.

"Why should there be military measures? It is excluded as a possibility," Mr. Chernomyrdin said when asked about Mr. Surikov's report.

However he added: "I do not think they (the Baltic countries) will join NATO."

Mr. Chernomyrdin focussed most of his criticism on Estonia — the Baltic state which is the most critical of Moscow — saying it and Latvia were breaching human rights in their treatment of Russian minorities.

Both Estonia and Latvia have large Russian minorities who were mostly denied automatic citizenship of the newly-independent countries in 1991.

This was resented by local ethnic Russians and Moscow alike although the Baltic states regard many of the Russians living in their countries as colonists.

Mr. Chernomyrdin said relations with Lithuania were good and that ties with Latvia were improving. "We are neighbours. We have to live together."

"They are sovereign states. They have the right to choose their own point of view," Mr. Chernomyrdin said.

The Russian document laid out reasons why Russian Armed Forces could be involved in conflict. It named the aspiration of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia to join NATO as one reason why Russian troops

could go to war.

The three states remain sensitive to any indications of renewed Russian imperialism, especially in the run-up to the Russian presidential elections in June.

Mr. Surikov, head of the Russian Defence Research Institute, represents a hard-line view of Russian foreign policy that sees NATO as an enemy because of its plans to take in Russia's former Warsaw Pact allies, Western diplomats said.

Mr. Chernomyrdin admitted Russia and Sweden disagreed about the future of the Baltic countries. Stockholm supports their bid to integrate with Western alliances and has pledged its support to represent their interests.

"I cannot say our policies are the same," the Russian premier said after a two-hour meeting with Mr. Persson Thursday.

Meanwhile Russian Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov has accused the Baltic states of creaming off Russian raw materials for their own economic boom and warned the parasitic practice will stop if he is elected president in upcoming polls, Baltic media reported Friday.

Speaking to a Latvian daily which was quoted Friday by the Baltic News Service, Mr. Zyuganov said Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia were taking advantage of favourable prices for raw materials supplied from Russia to fuel their own export-driven boom.

"The Baltic states cannot exist other than as parasites on Russia," Mr. Zyuganov was quoted as saying.

"Estonia is currently the world's fifth largest exporter of non-ferrous metals, while the country has no mines and no conversion factories," said the Communist leader, who is mounting a strong challenge to Russian President Boris Yeltsin ahead of June presidential polls.

"Everything it is selling has been stolen from Russia."

Mr. Zyuganov said if elected president he would terminate the current policy of selling raw materials and energy to the Baltic states at prices way below the international market level.

"Some politicians believe we should send the tanks to the Baltic states, but that is not necessary," Mr. Zyuganov said. "We just have to slap international prices on the Baltic states for oil and raw materials."

Solana tries to reassure Romania on NATO alliance membership

BUCHAREST (R) — NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana arrived in Bucharest Friday and tried to reassure Romania it was not forgotten in the alliance's expansion plans.

"No decision has been taken about the countries that may be invited one day to join the alliance," Mr. Solana told reporters when he arrived from neighbouring Bulgaria.

"We are now in the phase of bilateral debates and we'll see in the end how we proceed," he said, adding that the process of talks on admission would go on through 1996.

There is a widespread view among NATO diplomats that Romania is trailing other competing former East Bloc states vying to join the Atlantic alliance.

Bucharest is Mr. Solana's last stop on a tour which has already taken in Prague, Bratislava, Tirana and Sofia, and some eyebrows were raised that he is spending only six hours in the Romanian capital.

The Romanian government, which has pegged its entire post-Communist foreign and defence policy on membership of NATO and the European Union, is desperate to seek reassurance from Mr. Solana that it is not already written out of the schedule for what many expect to be the first tier of admission.

Mr. Solana said the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) appreciated that Romania had been the first country to join its partnership for peace programme to draw former East Bloc states towards the alliance's umbrella, and its contribution to NATO peacekeeping forces in former Yugoslavia.

"Your country was the first that signed the PFP and we will never forget that," he said.

Romania reversed a decision not to send peacekeeping troops to neighbouring states and earlier this year sent a team of engineers to assist the NATO Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia.

Despite that and a dramatic reshaping of its armed forces to integrate with NATO and meet requirements of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty, Romania remains deeply nervous that it could be left behind other states seeking membership.

Diplomats say Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland are the prime candidates for early membership of the alliance, with possible invitations to join as early as 1997 and formal membership from 1999.

A stumbling block for Romania is the lack so far of treaties with Hungary, Ukraine and Russia setting aside old territorial and other disputes, a precondition for NATO and EU membership.

Some diplomats in Bucharest fear that if Romania — the second largest country in the region after Poland — is not drawn into the alliance from the first then NATO risks recreating an Eastern Europe divided between Catholic and Orthodox Christian states similar to that after the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

One idea voiced by former Prime Minister Petre Roman, now a leading opposition, is for some sort of half-way house for those not admitted to NATO in the first wave, though this is regarded as a heresy in the ruling Party of Social Democracy (PDSR), facing elections this year.

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Chairman of the Board of Directors:

MAHMOUD AL KAYED

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Editor-in-Chief:

GEORGE S. HAWATMEN

Editorial and advertising offices:

Jordan Press Foundation,

University Road, P.O. Box 6710, Amman, Jordan.

Telephone: 684311, 699634

Telex: 21497 ALRAI JO

Facsimile: 696183

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Differing treatments

BOTH ISRAELI Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat received warm welcomes from U.S. President Bill Clinton last week. The difference is that all Mr. Arafat came back with from his Washington trip were words and rhetorical statements of support from the American government while Mr. Peres returned home having signed new agreements under which Israel will receive more funds, more arms and more political support from its arch ally.

The difference in treatment which the two leaders had in Washington will definitely reflect on the attitude of Israel and the Palestine National Authority when they start their final status negotiations in Taba Sunday.

Israel is going to the talks assuming the posture of the stronger party which is determined to benefit from the balance of power which clearly favours it in all domains. The Palestinians, on the other hand, will drive to Taba knowing that they will not be able to get much from Israel at this point.

The only reason the talks are starting Sunday is because they have to start in order for Israel to appear as if it is abiding by the Oslo deal. As for the PNA, it needs the negotiations to commence to show its people that the peace talks are still on and that the peace process might yet result in positive achievements for the Palestinians.

But nothing solid is expected to emerge from the talks. Nothing of the sort will happen before the Israeli elections of May 29 which Mr. Peres is doing all he can to ensure that he wins. Hence is the continuation of the closure of the self-rule areas despite the suffering it is causing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. It seems that for Peres, for Arafat and for Clinton, the priority now is getting Mr. Peres reelected. Everything else comes next, including the lifting of the closure and the welfare of the Palestinian people who have been besieged in their self-rule areas for more than two months.

That is why the Taba talks are not going to be more than a ceremonial gathering that will also benefit Mr. Peres' reelection bid because of the uncompromising stand on many crucial issues with which Israel is approaching the talks. These issues include Jerusalem, refugees, Israeli settlements and even matters which were supposed to be resolved before the final status negotiations such as Israeli withdrawal from Hebron.

But election times always impose their agendas on the political scenes of any country. The important thing is to work towards ensuring that this agenda changes once the elections are over. Such a change of agendas is an imperative for the success of the final status talks and the whole peace process. The issues at stake are very difficult; the road to resolving them will also be difficult. Israel must make difficult decisions to ensure a smooth start for a new Middle East based on recognition of the others' rights and a will to give and take.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

FAHD AL FANEK, a writer for Al Ra'i daily, said a decision by the ruling Labour Party of Israel on deleting a clause in the party's election manifesto that rejected the idea of the creation of a Palestine state can by no means improve its image or those of the party leaders. It was under a Labour government that Israel waged war on the Arab states and occupied lands belonging to three Arab countries in 1967, and it was under the Labour Party also that Israel waged a genocide campaign against the people of Lebanon, said the writer. On the other hand, while the Likud Party is accused of adopting hawkish policies against the Arabs, one can only recall that it was under the Likud that the Egypt-Israel peace treaty was signed; securing the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Sinai, and it was under the Likud that Israel was involved in the Madrid peace conference which initiated the Middle East peace process, noted the writer. While the Labour Party leader Shimon Peres is described as a dove and willing to reach peace with the Arabs, he is in fact pursuing a dangerous policy in the Middle East and taking a very adamant stand vis-à-vis Syria and Lebanon, said the writer. He said it is clear that only a Likud-led government in Israel is able to offer concessions to the Arabs and arrive at a final settlement of the conflict.

With the application of the new labour law, starting in the coming month, hopes rise that unemployment rates in Jordan will decrease after all, said Mohammed Daoud, a writer for Al Dustour. It is because the new law fixes the minimum wages of Jordanian workers and closes 15 occupations before the non-Jordanians that one can feel guardedly optimistic that the Jordanian job seekers will finally be reduced in number, said the writer. But it has to be noted that the Ministry of Labour has this year issued 95,000 work permits to guest workers, something which does not help the ministry much in finding jobs for 60,000 Jordanians, as it has been claiming once the new labour law has been enforced. We have heard many promises from the ministry about measures to reduce the number of non-Jordanian workers in the country and finding jobs for the local workers, nothing has materialised in the past few years, said the writer. It is hoped, added the writer, that the ministry will strictly apply the new law for the sake of safeguarding Jordan's national interests.

Jordanian Perspective

Fight against corruption — litmus test for government

By Dr. Musa Kellani

NOW THAT the long Eid holiday is over, we could expect the newly appointed team to fight corruption to begin its task in earnest. It is not an easy job though, given the decades-old practices that seem to have set into the corridors of our government and public and semi-public institutions. Furthermore, lack of commitment and seriousness in all past efforts has made people automatically discount all talk about fighting corruption.

In fact, whenever any reference is made to fighting corruption, the first thing that comes to the minds of most Jordanians is a simple question: How could any government or prime minister seriously fight corruption when many members of the so-called elite club of Jordan — the minority which controls the majority of real wealth inside and outside the country — seem to be somehow linked with the phenomenon.

To say the least, ordinary Jordanians are both frustrated and indignant about the issue. During the 1970s and 80s, they say, a handful of people became overnight millionaires through means that could deceive no one as being legitimate. And then came the shock of the currency crisis of 1988/89, which raised the awareness of people that chunks of public funds that were supposed to have been channelled to public welfare were being rerouted to secret bank accounts abroad, owned by people who occupied government positions.

However, the marked difference this time around is the pledge that Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti has made, both in public and private, to root out corruption from among our midst. The consistent focus Mr. Kabariti has given to the issue since assuming office in February is the best evidence that eliminating corruption is one of the

policy priorities of his government.

The outstanding first step that the government has undertaken in this respect is the appointment of a top-level committee, headed by someone who has one of the cleanest records in Jordan and made up of people known for their integrity and honesty as well as dedication to serving the country. The committee is backed by a panel of young judges, also known for their no-nonsense approach, who will ensure that culprits would not walk away through some loopholes in the legal system.

The very individualities and known dedication and devotion of those named as key players in fighting corruption have given many Jordanians hope that after decades of talk in vain, their society has taken the first solid step towards being cleansed of corruption. Expectations are high that Jordanians would not only see those corrupt people who could largely be held accountable for many of the woes of the country because of their self-oriented actions being brought to book, but also witness a marked improvement in the way public funds are spent to benefit the public.

As is usual the case with high expectations, the Kabariti government runs a major risk here if it is not able to deliver on its promise to eliminate corruption. Regardless of all political achievements that the government could secure, any failure on its part to press ahead with the fight against corruption and produce concrete results would weigh too heavily against it in the balance. Simply put, people could not care less for politics when it comes to corruption and the associated deep-rooted feeling among many Jordanians that part of their troubles, whether in terms of unemployment or poverty, stems from government corruption.

Mr. Kabariti and his team should and must be able to muster all resources of the country in the fight against corruption, whether in terms of legislation or otherwise.

It is to be recalled that a draft legislation is lingering on the shelves of the Upper House of Parliament. If enacted, the draft law, approved by the Lower House of Parliament more than four years ago, would be a key tool in the fight against corruption. Aply named "where did you get this," the draft legislation will empower the authorities to ask any Jordanian to provide details of his or her wealth and account for its origins.

Independent estimates say that Jordanians hold between \$5 billion and \$6 billion in bank accounts abroad. While not discounting the fact that part of those funds may represent money gained through legitimate means, it might be very interesting to see many others trying to account for their holdings.

It will seem that the draft law found its way to the bottom of priorities of the Upper House if only because some influential figures in the Senate found the proposed legislation not exactly fitting their vested interests, and thus it has been languishing in the tightly bound files of Parliament.

Indeed, the government cannot interfere with the work of the legislature, but it has at its disposal many ways and means to wake up the senators from their slumber and push the draft law through for enactment.

That will be another key litmus test for the resolve, determination and strength of the government to advance the fight against corruption.

THE WEEK IN PRINT

'Defence pact aims to spread American, Israeli influence in region'

Reviewed by Elia Nasrallah

IN THE local Arabic dailies, writers and columnists last week gave prominence to the U.S.-Israeli defence pact, the repercussions of the Israeli aggression on Lebanon, prospects for the Palestinians in their quest to regain their legitimate rights and domestic affairs.

Al Dustour said in an editorial that the new U.S.-Israeli alliance is bound to boost Israel's political and military power and encourage the Jewish state to launch further acts of aggression on its neighbours.

With this pact, the United States is giving Israel a free hand to carry out its expansionist plans and aggressive policies in the Arab region, something which is bound to negatively affect the Middle East peace process, said the paper.

The new pact is bound to open the U.S. arsenal of sophisticated weapons and technology to the Jewish state and does not augur well for the future of the Middle East.

How can the United States remain its role as a Middle East peace broker by concluding a defence pact with the Jewish state which still occupies Arab lands, in defiance of U.N. resolutions and international law? asked Ibrahim Al Absi, a writer for Al Ra'i daily.

Concluded at the worst moment, the new alliance is not only a step in the wrong direction, it also deals a heavy blow to the peace process and is bound to further escalate tension that could perpetuate the Middle East conflict, continued the writer.

For the sake of preserving credibility, the United States could have at least refrained from signing the military pact with Israel until the peace process has been completed and a comprehensive settlement has been achieved, he added.

The U.S. administration must have taken this unprecedented step in order to secure the Jewish votes for President Clinton in the coming presidential elections, but, he said, this step is so dangerous not only to the peace process but also to the future of the Arab-American relations.

Writing under the title of "Unholy alliance", a columnist for Al Dustour said that the Arab World is raging with anger over the U.S.-Israeli defence pact because it is clearly aimed at spreading U.S.-Israeli influence in the Arab region.

Coming on the heels of President Clinton's recent visit to Israel, Nawaf Zaru said that the pact came as a further step to support Israel's aggressive policies.

He said that this is an alliance for launching aggression on the Arab Nation and another move on the part of the enemies of the Arabs to abort any Arab move towards regaining legitimate rights and liberate their occupied lands.

Indeed, he added, this pact constitutes yet another blow to the peace process and the Arab countries that are making peace with the Jewish state.

The U.S.-Israeli defence pact came ahead of the U.S. and Israeli general elections and was designed to boost the image of President Clinton before the American Jewish voters and that of Shimon Peres before the Israeli electorate, according to Mohammed Kharrub, a writer for Al Ra'i.

The pact could not have come at a worse time for the Arabs who are deeply divided and lack the minimum level of solidarity in the face of the common threat represented by the continued Israeli aggression, said the writer.

He said that the latest Israeli aggression on Lebanon has exposed the impotence of the Arab Nation, and the U.S.-Israeli military alliance is bound to keep the Arab countries divided and unable to rise up and meet the new challenge, let alone deter Israel's continued acts of aggression.

Fahd Al Faneik, a writer for Al Ra'i, expressed the view that the ceasefire arrangement in Lebanon was a temporary halt to the fighting which, he said, would soon flare up again.

As long as there is no permanent solution to

the Lebanese question and Israel continues to occupy parts of Lebanon and as long as foreign forces and militias continue to wield power over that country, there can be no peace at all, according to the writer.

He said that the 1993 ceasefire arrangement that put an end to fighting between Hizbollah and Israel did not hold, nor did it prevent intermittent flare ups of exchanged shelling across the border.

The U.S. came up with this temporary arrangement, said the writer, after realising its total failure in handling the crisis and in order to save face before the world.

He noted that the ceasefire arrangement keeps the door open for any future developments.

The operation "Grapes of wrath" has met with total failure, with Israel unable to achieve its objectives in Lebanon, said Yasser Ziaatreh, a columnist for Al Dustour.

Indeed the Hizbollah resistance group achieved success by securing a written statement signed by the Americans and the Israelis admitting that the Lebanese resistance against occupation is a legitimate right, he said.

On the domestic front, the Hizbollah group won overwhelming support from the various Lebanese factions, from the government in Beirut and from Damascus which adhered to its position in support of the Lebanese people's rights, added the writer.

Furthermore, he said, the Israeli aggression on the defenceless Lebanese has exposed Israel's ugly face to the whole world.

Samir Qumli, a writer for Al Ra'i, decried the stand of the Arab League and that of the world community vis-à-vis the Israeli aggression on the Lebanese.

He said that instead of demanding that Israel pull out from Lebanon, in implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 425, the world community and the United Nations were even unable to condemn Israel's aggression and its continued defiance of the international law.

Being a member of the Arab League, Lebanon is entitled to get support and protection from its sister Arab states, in the face of external aggression, and entitled to a meeting by the Arab League to decide on measures to deter Israel, but the unfortunate people in south Lebanon have been left alone facing the genocide and the Israeli barbaric attacks by land, sea and air, said the writer.

He said had there been an attack on Israel or its embassies abroad, the whole world, including the Arab League, would have raised the hue and cry.

The latest Israeli aggression on Lebanon, said a writer for Al Dustour, has proved again that the Middle East is still far off from political or economic stability or security and peace.

Taher Adwan said the aggression has proved that unless a comprehensive settlement has been achieved, neither the Arab countries nor Israel can enjoy real peace, nor can they direct their attention towards reconstruction and development.

He said that the Israeli war on Lebanon was also a war on prospects of regional investments and a war on peace. But, he noted, while Israel enjoys access to continued U.S. and Zionist financial aid, the Arab countries are not in a position to finance even the reconstruction of the houses devastated in Lebanon by the Israeli aggression.

A writer for Al Dustour attacked a Palestine National Council decision to scrap clauses in the Palestinian Charter calling for the destruction of Israel before securing commitments on the part of the Jewish state to carry out its part of the bargain included in the Oslo agreements.

Naji Alloush said that the council's decision was taken under Israeli coercion, that it was forced on the Palestinians while the Israeli occupation is still in place and that it was taken while Israel is involved in a barbaric war against the Lebanese people.

The writer said that the council had no right to decide on issues directly connected with the future of the Palestinian homeland and sovereignty.

'Grapes of Wrath' — who won, who lost?

By G. H. Jansen

THERE IS a certain small and unusual satisfaction in trying to answer that question because, by and large, the good guys won and the bad guys lost. Even though the bad-dies may think they have won.

The losers are Israel and its Prime Minister Shimon Peres, and the U.S. in sheer human and material terms; Lebanon; morally, the PLO, which advanced its negotiations with Israel at a time the other Arabs were condemning it.

The winners are the Hizbollah militia, Syria and its President Hafez Al Assad; the Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al Hariri; and France.

Israel is a loser because, quite simply, it failed to achieve its stated goal which was to hurt, damage and control Hizbollah so that in future it would not be able to fire Katyusha rockets into Israeli population centres in northern Galilee. But Hizbollah remains intact and it can and will resume its attacks on the Israeli occupation zone and would resume rocketing if that served its politico-military purposes.

The Israeli plan was to expel the Hizbollah fighters from south Lebanon, to drive them out and then to isolate them from the local population — that is drying up the water of the civilian populace in which the guerrilla fish swim. Instead, and perhaps because of their patriotism and Shiite faith, the Hizbollah fighters did not run away but stayed put. In fact, they had the last word on the military plane, because when the Israelis ceased fire, half an hour before the deadline, the Hizbollah Katyushas continued up to two minutes before the deadline. The local people, admiring the guerrillas' determination and courage, refused to turn their backs on the fighters who became even more enthusiastically accepted by the local society.

Hizbollah, it is now admitted, is Lebanon's "national resistance", stronger, better organised, more admired than even before. A resounding defeat for Israel.

Israel's undeserved military reputation was blown to bits when, through what Israel said was "human error," or perhaps through deliberate targeting, 120 civilian refugees were slaughtered at the U.N. headquarters in the village of Cana. Israeli claims to "surgical strikes" and "pinpoint accuracy" of their targeting have become bad jokes.

Another defeat for Israel is that whereas there was a division in the Lebanese populace, with some Maronite Christians looking in friendship and admiration to Israel as the only non-Muslim force in the area, even they now hate Israel for the brutal and destructive methods used to assault Hizbollah in Lebanon.

Shimon Peres has failed because even his supporters in Israel admit that he started "Grapes of Wrath" not in order to defend his country or to save the lives of its people, but in order to improve his chances in the forthcoming election for prime minister and his party's prospects in the parliamentary poll.

He was trying to show his prowess as a soldier, as a military man, but 16 days of conflict showed that he was not even good at playing at soldiers. And all the more so when the Hizbollah enemy was left intact and for the first time was given the right in writing to attack Israeli soldiers.

The U.S. lost because its behaviour confirmed, once again, to the Arabs that America was the permanent enemy of the Arab people and the willing, subservient servant of the American Zionist lobby. This was emphasised when Israel insisted that only the U.S., on its own, should draw up the ceasefire agreement — in an attempt to exclude France which was more even handed. An attempt which failed.

Looked at realistically now after "Grapes of Wrath", the all-too-obedient U.S. reveals itself as no longer the sole world superpower but only Israel's strategic partner.

Among the external losers was Palestine Pres-

ident Yasser Arafat and the PLO because one of the reasons Israel launched "Grapes of Wrath" was to avenge the 59 Israelis killed by Palestinian Islamist bombers in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv — so Lebanese were punished for Arafat's failure to control his Islamists. Arabs who sat on the sidelines and twiddled their thumbs while Lebanon suffered also lost popular credibility. Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak just about saved his skin when, belatedly, he described the Israeli aggression as an "unforgivable sin."

The winners? All too obviously Lebanon suffered grievous material damage from the Israeli attack, estimated in total at \$500 million. It is that damage that has united and enraged the Lebanese.

Though Syria, its President Assad and Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri are among the winners on the political plane but they can also be counted among the losers because they tried and failed to get into the ceasefire "understanding" any reaffirmation of Security Council Resolution 425 which calls on Israel to get out of southern Lebanon.

Thus, Hizbollah is saying it will continue to attack Israeli soldiers — as they have the right to do under the ceasefire — until Israel withdraws.

That apart, Syria and Assad are clear winners as even the Israelis and Americans ruefully admit. It was the Syrian president who "ran" the political side of the ceasefire negotiations which is why the really crucial talks were held in Damascus. And why Assad was sufficiently assured of his position to snub U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, allegedly refusing to see him when he arrived thirty minutes late for an appointment in the Syrian capital (but in reality to force the U.S. to negotiate with Lebanon directly).

It was Syria which advised and encouraged Hizbollah not to give in and also allowed Iran to resupply Hizbollah with Katyushas mid-way in the 16-day onslaught. And Syria compelled Hizbollah to agree to a ceasefire when Assad's terms for a ceasefire were conceded by Israel.

The Lebanese prime minister has also done well out of "Grapes of Wrath" for while he was much criticised and castigated before the operation was launched, after 16 days of conflict he became a recognised and respected national leader. By travelling around the region he rallied the Arabs behind Lebanon and presented his country's case very ably on worldwide satellite television. He has just enough of a grasp of English to be an effective international spokesman.

When the "understanding" was agreed he was able to say to Israel: "I told you that using force was useless and now I have been proven right." Few prime ministers can say that at the end of a military campaign.

His particular achievement was to get Israel to agree not to attack infrastructural targets in future, many of them rebuilt under his post-war reconstruction programme. One can safely predict that earlier criticisms of Hariri as prime minister have been set aside and that he will remain in office for a good long while to come.

Thanks to the role it played in bringing about the ceasefire, France too gained much from "Grapes of Wrath". Though it was the former mandatory power in Lebanon, France had been sidelined in the Levant region, first by Britain and then by the U.S. The way in which the Americans tried to push France out of the "Grapes of Wrath" picture was crude and ineffective because the French president had obviously given his Foreign Minister Hervé de Charette (who was in the region for 14 out of the 16 days of hostilities) instructions to stand by the Arabs at a time when the U.S. and Britain were behaving like junior allies of Israel.

"Mother France", to Lebanese Christian terminology, has proved herself to be a good maternal relation to all Lebanese and will benefit from this relationship.

The mayor of Kiryat Shmonah, the main frontier town in Israel where Hizbollah rocketing damaged 1,350 buildings and put to flight three-quarters of the residents, has described "Grapes of Wrath" as a "failure" because hostilities are bound to resume in the not too distant future. And so too have the returning residents of the town. The Israelis should take to heart the words of Rafik Al Hariri. "Only a negotiated political settlement can bring real and lasting peace."

Peres wins foreign support, but fails to convince voters

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Prime Minister Shimon Peres has won international endorsement in his bid to stay in power but is struggling to convince voters at home with less than four weeks to go to Israel's general election.

Opinion polls on Friday showed the Labour premier with a narrow lead of between three and seven points over his rival Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the opposition right-wing Likud Party.

For the first time, Israel is to hold direct elections to choose its prime minister on May 29. The right and left-wing blocs are running neck-and-neck in a separate race for parliamentary seats, according to the polls.

Despite a triumphant U.S. visit, an end to Hizbollah rocket attacks on Israel, and the Palestinian vote to scrap articles in its charter calling for the Jewish state's destruction, Peres has not left his challenger trailing by far.

"If Labour doesn't get its act together, it risks losing the elections," warned Shlomo Lahat, a campaign official for the party.

But Foreign Minister Ehud Barak, campaign manager for Mr. Peres, is confident that assault against Hizbollah, the military cooperation accords signed in Washington, and the PLO vote will all pay dividends soon.

"This last week was one of the best for Shimon Peres. It's true that the opinion polls don't reflect that... but it will all have an impact in the coming days."

Mr. Peres in Washington last week won outright support from U.S. President Bill Clinton, whose country is the chief sponsor of the Middle East peace process which Likud opposes. Mr. Clinton is a highly popular figure in Israel.

King Hassan II of Morocco, also cast his vote for Mr.

Peres on Thursday, saying his election victory would be "essential" for the peace process.

In the middle of Israel's assault on Lebanon which cost nearly 200 Arab lives, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat had anti-Israeli clauses erased from the Palestinian charter.

While robbing Likud of what was a potential election weapon against Mr. Peres, Mr. Arafat has also thrown in his influence among Israel's Arabs who account for 13 per cent of the electorate.

David Levy, the Likud number two and a former foreign minister, accused Labour on Friday of seeking to win Israeli votes with the support of foreign leaders, saying the play would fail.

Of Moroccan origin himself, Mr. Levy criticised the king's interference in the election campaign.

The war in Lebanon, although it did not cost a single Israeli life, also failed to convince the Israeli public that Mr. Peres has overcome his Achilles' heel: security.

Opinion polls still give Mr. Netanyahu higher marks on "the fight against terrorism," a bad sign at a time when security chiefs are warning of more attacks by Palestinian militants.

But an aide to Mr. Peres said the Israeli leader was never fooled by the 15-20 per cent lead he held over Mr. Netanyahu after the assassination in November of his predecessor Yitzhak Rabin.

The prime minister knew all along the contest would be tight, as has almost always been the case in past elections because of the almost equal left-right divide in Israeli society.

"Mr. Peres is convinced, just like he was before, that the elections will be decided by just tens of thousands of votes," the aide said.

Neighbours implicate Afghanistan in drugs

TASHKENT (AFP) — Afghanistan on Friday was accused by international specialists gathered in the Uzbek capital Tashkent of being behind a rise in drug trafficking in central Asia.

"It is with drug money that the various Afghan factions purchase their weapons," said Uzbek President Islam Karimov at the beginning of a two-day meeting here.

He added that the United Nations should impose a weapons embargo against Afghanistan, which he charged, was using its border with Tajikistan as a transit point for the smuggling of opium and cannabis.

In 1995, 1,300 kilograms of drugs were seized, and 600 additional kilos were seized in the first three months of this year," he said.

Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdul Aziz Kamilov estimated that drug trafficking

nets dealers up to \$500 billion a year. According to the United Nations, the five former Soviet republics in Central Asia also have illegal opium poppy fields being cultivated on their soil.

"The total area under illicit opium poppy cultivation is estimated at around 2,000 hectares capable of producing more than 30 tonnes of opium," according to a U.N. report. "Cannabis grows wild everywhere across central Asia, but most extensively on about 170,000 hectares in the Chu Valley, shared by Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan."

The foreign ministers of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan are to sign during their unprecedented meeting here a memorandum to coordinate their efforts in battling the drug problem.

Greece to modernise military

XANTHI (AFP) — Greece plans to modernise its army and purchase modern weaponry, Prime Minister Costas Simitis announced on Friday in a speech marked by angry outbursts against Turkey.

"I have asked that the financing of a programme to modernise and revamp the army's weaponry be studied and I would like this to proceed as quickly as possible," Mr. Simitis said in a speech before the army's fourth corps in this town located in the northern province of Thrace. The prime minister was here on the second leg of

a three-day trip. Mr. Simitis said Greece must adopt a strategy based on "legality and a strong defence" when dealing with Turkey.

The two countries — allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation — have been at loggerheads in recent months, notably over a disputed islet in the Aegean Sea.

"After taking over our sea and air, they now want Greek territory," Mr. Simitis said, adding that in the face of what he called "Turkey's expansionist stand, the answer is clear. Greece must be strong."

47,000 weapons seized since 1993 in Egypt

CAIRO (AFP) — Egyptian police have confiscated nearly 47,000 weapons in their fight against Muslim militants over the last three years, including artillery pieces and anti-aircraft rockets, the government daily Al-Ahram reported Friday. Since 1993, police have seized a total of 46,950 weapons and 4,377 kilograms of TNT, the paper said. Most of the weapons were locally-made rifles, but also included 7,228 automatic and semi-automatic guns, 5,951 pistols and 490 artillery pieces. Apart from the TNT, 382 hand grenades, 17 anti-aircraft missiles and two launchers were also found.

Politicians turn away from enslaved Indian children

By Sonali Verma
Reuters

NEW DELHI — Vijay Ram looks a lot like any other nine-year-old Indian boy — scrawny, short-haired and clad in tight trousers. The only way you can tell he is different is by his dazed expression.

Ram was stolen from his village home in northern India when he was six years old by the owner of a carpet loom, who valued the child's nimble fingers that could tie the fine knots in precious Indian carpets.

"When I said I was tired, he would pour hot water over me or suspend me over a well until I said I was ready to work," Ram told a recent news conference, starting into the distance. "He would make me work even when I vomited blood

and never gave me medicine."

Ram is one of the tens of millions of Indian children who work in factories and mills instead of going to school. India is home to the world's largest workforce of children.

But child labour is not seen as an election issue as rhetoric flies fast and thick before polls in April and May.

The labour ministry says 18 million children are enslaved as labourers, but child's rights activists say there are some 60 million poor children working in dangerous industries like match-making, quarrying, tanning, bangle-making, carpet-weaving, brick kilns and fireworks factories.

Swami Agnivesh, a saffron-clad Hindu holy man who heads the Bandhua

Mukti Morcha (Bondage Labour Liberation Front) says loom-owners buy children for as little as 50 rupees (\$1.55).

India officially prohibited the employment of children under 14 years in 1948 and, in 1986, banned 17 industries considered hazardous from employing children above 14.

Politicians seem content to look the other way rather than risk losing the favour of industrialists and households that employ children, who cannot vote until the age of 18.

Few parties mention child labour in their manifestos, which rather focus on checking corruption and attacking Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's economic liberalisation policy.

The leftist Samajwadi Party mentions children

under its labour policy but says only that it will introduce strict laws to stop cruelty and injustice against children, and will seriously consider measures to counter malnutrition.

India has in recent years rejected western efforts to link labour standards to global trade benefits, widely seen as a western ploy to deprive India of a valuable cost advantage.

Activists say about 1.2 million children work in carpet factories alone in India, Nepal and Pakistan. About 80 per cent of India's child labourers work on farms and in roadside tea stalls, working to repay parents' debts to rural loan sharks.

Working children are common not only in remote corners of rural India but also in the homes of educat-

ed, affluent, urban families, where children aged 10 years and over are hired to cook, clean and serve their employers' children.

"It's good for both of us," says a lawyer's wife in her home in a posh southern Delhi suburb, gesturing towards her kitchen where a 13-year-old boy is cooking. "He is willing to work and learns quickly, and he earns a reasonable amount of money too."

"An experienced cook would want more money. And children are so honest, so innocent."

Prime Minister Rao has in recent years introduced schemes to draw children into school, including offering to pay parents to educate their children and doling out meals in schools.

But observers say Rao's pledge to stamp out child

labour in dangerous industries by the year 2000 seems far fetched as parents, swamped by poverty, continue to sell their children into slavery across the sprawling nation.

Seven-year-old Tunnu says his father, a farm worker, sent him with a factory-owner who promised the boy would be given food and a regular income in exchange for eight hours of labour daily.

But the owner of the carpet mill, where Tunnu knotted yarn from the crack of dawn till past midnight, paid the small, thin boy only 100 rupees (\$2.90) for eight months of labour.

"He used to beat me when I said I was tired," Tunnu said. "And they only let us bathe once a month — all the children were given one cake of soap to share."

France's Lyon seeks world map spot from G7 summit

By Francois Raitberger
Reuters

LYON, France — France's second city Lyon, eager to regain the international prestige it enjoyed as a mediaeval trading centre, has landed a jackpot of sorts — hosting this year's annual group of seven summit.

Elated city officials could not dream of a better chance of putting Lyon on the map than welcoming the leaders of the world's wealthiest industrial democracies with their expected escort of 2,800 reporters and camera crews.

"This is a formidable opportunity to show off Lyon to the world," said Deputy Mayor Andre Soulier.

The June 27-29 summit on the bank of the River Rhone will bring together the leaders of the United States, Japan, Germany, Britain, Italy, Canada and France, with Russia joining the last day.

Lyon, a thriving city of

1.2 million geared to the future but still nostalgic about its past as the Roman capital of Gaul and a major Renaissance trading centre, could do with a bit of international publicity.

Its main exposure in foreign media has been the undignified demise of its former mayor, Michel Noir, in a graft case symbolising high living by French politicians at the expense of business in the 1980s.

Mr. Noir, a former trade minister with presidential ambitions, was given an 18-month suspended prison term last January for taking illicit gifts and campaign funds from his flamboyant businessman son-in-law Pierre Botton.

Playing host to the summit due to focus on the fight against unemployment will be the current Mayor Raymond Barre, prime minister from 1976 to 1981 and hailed by then President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing as "France's best economist".

Political sources say the G7 summit was President

Jacques Chirac's gift to Mr. Barre in return for backing him in last year's race for the French presidency.

France has hosted three previous G7 summits, the very first one in the seclusion of a hunting chateau at Rambouillet in 1975, a spectacular one in Louis XIV's Versailles Palace in 1982, and a gala event in Paris in 1989, coinciding with the bicentennial of the French revolution.

This year's summit will be the biggest international event ever organised in the Lyon region, although Mr. Chirac wants it to be a more modest gathering than recent G7s.

Local officials, awed by the size of the gathering, trust the elegant city straddling the rivers Rhone and Saone has the assets to make it a success.

It boasts a sprawling riverside congress centre overlooking a public park and rose garden, good communications, and, last but not least, a reputation as a centre for gastronomy.

The city boasts some of France's gourmet temples, including the three-star restaurant of master chef Paul Bocuse. Locals joke that a third river irrigates Lyon — Beaujolais wine, flowing freely from the hills to the north.

Officials say Mr. Chirac intends to put his relaxed mark on the summit. Besides working lunches in the Tete d'Or Park, he plans to take his guests for a beer in the picturesque Renaissance quarter and a downtown restaurant dinner.

The race is hot among Lyon's chefs to win his favour.

As French people grumble about an economic slowdown, tax rises and a tightening of the indebted welfare system, the president wants to make the summit a simple, low-cost occasion, bucking the trend of G7 extravaganzas.

Organisers plan to make maximum use of existing buildings, with only a few purpose-built temporary facilities. But they say it is

hard to persuade participants to keep delegation numbers down to the level of last year's meeting in Halifax, Canada.

The heads of state and government will meet at the museum of contemporary art, a square white building beside the Rhone, near the headquarters of the world police agency Interpol.

The image local officials hope to convey is that of a city firmly established as France's second economic centre at the hub of a network of motorways and high-speed trains between northern and southern Europe.

Lyon is strategically located on the main north-south axis to the Mediterranean. Sleek TGV trains race there at 300 kph in just two hours from Paris, with a branch line bypassing the city to serve a futuristic railway station beneath Lyon's Satolas international airport.

Work is under way to extend the TGV line to Marseille and Barcelona,

and an ambitious plan to dig a 54-km tunnel under the Alps would put Lyon 80 minutes from Turin.

A new motorway bypassing the city centre has all but eliminated a motorists' nightmare of a huge bottleneck that used to mar their holiday rush to the Riviera and Spain.

To engrave Lyon's image as an international centre in the minds of its youngest citizens, food specialties of G7 nations are being served in school canteens to mark each country's traditional children's festivals.

American, Canadian and British dishes graced Halloween in November, German cuisine was served on Saint Nicolas's day in December and Italian specialties marked Befana in January.

This month, Lyon's schoolchildren will celebrate Japan's Hina Matsuri by eating Japanese food with chopsticks.

Ferret lovers want cuddly pets legalised

By Leonard Navarro
Reuters

SAN DIEGO — Nervous eyes look towards the door as two knocks signal another arrival. The door opens and a woman in her 30s, hiding something beneath her jacket, sticks her head into the cramped back room, where men and women are huddled around a table.

"Is this the ferret meeting?" she asks. She is told yes and enters with her contraband, a two-year-old female ferret who joins three more of its kind and two dozen humans at another meeting of Ferrets Anonymous.

Members — some with their pets — meet monthly in this southern California seaport city to discuss their animals' diets, shedding, matchmaking, sleeping habits and ailments. But the

chief reason they get together is to change the law. Ferret ownership is illegal in only two states in America, California and Hawaii.

Often described as a cross between a kitten and a two-year-old child, the cuddly and playful furry-faced animal, with its long body and pointy tail, may be popular in other states as a house pet and prized in Europe and Canada as a hunter of rodents and rabbits, but in California it is feared as the plague by fish and game officials.

They argue that California's size and benevolent climate afford too many opportunities for non-native wildlife to proliferate and upset the natural food chain by competing with indigenous animal populations. They also fear the introduction of new animal diseases.

As a consequence, anyone caught in the state with a ferret faces up to a \$2,000 fine and the animals are confiscated and euthanised or ordered out of state.

Ferret owners say the fish and game argument is bogus.

"They don't have very good survival skills," says Pat Wright, president of Ferrets Anonymous and owner of three ferrets named Rocky, Gonzo and Daisy. "There's also the argument that they'll attack poultry, but the poultry industry is on record as supporting legalisation."

Ron Jurek, a biologist with the California Fish and Game Department, disagrees. "Anybody who says ferrets are not predatory is not willing to accept reality," said Mr. Jurek. "They have a broad feeding range of birds and mammals on the ground, and they would

feed on practically anything they could hunt and catch. Mr. Jurek said an isolated place like Catalina Island, off the coast of southern California, could easily be overrun by abandoned or runaway ferrets.

In addition, according to Kevin Reilly, a veterinarian with the state division of communicable diseases, "there's evidence these critters will attack infants in their playpens or cribs. We don't know what triggers that. It's fairly unusual, but not predictable."

Owners like Sally Statton, and Cynthia, a 20-year-old college student who would not give her last name, say there is little to fear from the naturally inquisitive creatures who prefer to spend their time clowning around, getting into things, burrowing, digging, scratching and — what else — ferreting.

"You can sit and watch them for hours. I think the reason they're illegal is that people don't really know what they're like," said Cynthia.

"We're trying to educate the public they're not the nasty little beasts that fish and game says they are," added Ms. Statton.

The group holds periodic rallies, with members carrying signs reading "Ferret freedom" and wearing T-shirts proclaiming "Ferrets are more fun" and "Ferrets, the original party animal."

Members are in the midst of statewide petition drive to have the California Fish and Game Commission declare ferrets, known by their species name as *Mustela putorius furo*, a domestic and legal animal. Two previous attempts to introduce bills in the state legislature failed. Meanwhile, ferret

fanciers are growing throughout the state. The group, a little more than two years old, has 2,000 members statewide and 17 chapters, compared to five only a year ago. Even politicians are wooing them for support.

San Diego community college board candidate Edmund Sorman found out just how tenuous that can be, after discussing his candidacy for 15 minutes, then stepping on one of Mr. Wright's ferrets as he leaned forward to hand out his business cards.

"That's one vote you lost," quipped Mr. Wright, as his pet ferret Rocky let out a squeal and scurried into a corner, more humbled than hurt.

Israel delays Hebron pullout

(Continued from page 1)

March but was postponed after a spate of militant suicide bombings in Israel killed around 60 people.

Hebron is the major West Bank town still under Israeli control, with seven others as well as the Gaza Strip having been handed over to Palestinian control.

Mr. Peres is haunted by fear that any attack could wreck his ruling Labour Party's chances of keeping in power by swinging public opinion to the right.

"The date is not yet set because Israel still has to coordinate the redeployment with the heads of Palestinian security," said Mr. Peres' spokeswoman, Aliza Goren.

"This coordination is particularly needed in a town like Hebron because of the presence of Arab and Jewish extremists which turns it into a powderkeg," Deputy Defence Minister Ori Orr said. Tensions run high in Heb-

ron where 400 settlers heavily guarded by Israeli troops live in the centre of 120,000 Palestinians. The nearby settlement of Kiryat Arba is also home to several thousand more Jews.

Mr. Orr said the new delay to the redeployment was "solely motivated by security reasons linked to the elections." However, if the right-wing wins the polls, the redeployment may never take place.

"The security reasons are only a pretext. In fact Peres is giving in to pressure from the right-wing and settlers," charged Environment Minister Yossi Sarid, from the Labour's left-wing coalition partner Meretz.

Settlers have held angry protests against the redeployment which they say will leave them vulnerable, and on Wednesday a Jew was stabbed and seriously wounded by a Palestinian in the centre of the town.

U.N. finds Cana attack deliberate

(Continued from page 1)

sponded to the further questions from Gen. Kappen, possibly as early as Monday, a U.N. spokesman said.

The attack on the U.N. compound caused international outrage and led to stepped up efforts to end Israel's assault aimed at silencing the Hizbollah rockets.

U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher brokered a ceasefire which came into effect last Saturday after 16 days of fighting which cost more than 170 lives, mainly civilians.

Lebanon will issue a stamp commemorating the "massacre at Cana," the Lebanese government announced.

"The council of ministers agreed to issue a memorial stamp for the massacre at Cana..." Information Minister Farid Makari said after a late-night cabinet meeting on Thursday.

The government also plans

to build a museum and monument to Israel's 18-year-old occupation of part of South Lebanon and to all incidents of Israeli violence against Lebanon, he said.

The monument and museum will be built in the southern suburbs of Beirut which Israeli aircraft attacked five times during the massive April 11-27 blitz on Lebanon.

Former Lebanese Prime Minister General Michel Aoun accused Syria on Friday of failing to come to the rescue of Lebanon under their defence accord during Israel's onslaught against Hizbollah.

"It would be better if the Syrian army withdrew (from Lebanon) today," the exiled Christian leader told the Arabic newspaper Al-Hayat.

"What happened to the (1991) Lebanese-Syrian defence accord?" asked Gen. Aoun.

U.S. to follow up visits

(Continued from page 1)

former Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman. The accord would ensure Israel of critical weapons shipments in the event of an Arab attack and of intelligence and other military cooperation along the lines of the United States provides to its NATO allies in Europe.

"We do not ask for American soldiers to come and defend our Israel," Mr. Peres said during his visit. But the "technicians" that could be sent to the Golden Heights if the 1,220-square-kilometre plateau is relinquished to Syria in a peace treaty still would bring U.S. personnel into a tense border region.

Mr. Arafat, meanwhile, is just starting to establish ties to the United States. But the agreement he reached with Mr. Clinton to "regularise our contacts with them," as a senior U.S. official said Thursday, is a significant step toward a U.S. relationship,

with an entity that has not even reached the status of statehood.

A joint U.S.-Palestinian commission would look into the economic needs of the Palestinians, including collection of nearly \$2 billion in promised international aid, and could give Mr. Arafat more leverage to persuade Israel to reverse its border closings so Palestinians can get to their jobs.

Mr. Arafat on Wednesday accused Israel of imposing "a very serious economic siege" by closing the border after Palestinians set off bombs in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Ashkelon.

The Palestinians will be seeking statehood in the talks opening Sunday with Israel in Tabat, but at this stage the Clinton administration is not using a commission to establish diplomatic ties, another senior U.S. official said Thursday.

Saudi trade minister calls for smooth WTO accession

GENEVA (R) — Saudi Arabia called Thursday for a smooth accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to help diversify its heavily oil-dependent economy, officials said.

But some trading countries, while supporting Riyadh's application, expressed concern that economic diversification should not come at the expense of higher tariffs, they added.

In a speech, Commerce Minister Osama Bin Jaafar Bin Ibrahim Faqih also hinted the oil giant wanted to join on favourable terms granted to developing countries, ac-

cording to trade sources who attended the closed-door talks at WTO headquarters.

It was the first meeting of the WTO working party which will negotiate Saudi Arabia's terms of entry to the 120-member body. The process is expected to take at least a year.

Riyadh hopes that joining the Geneva-based watchdog will help clear barriers to exports of its petrochemicals, mainly to Europe and the United States, according to a Saudi diplomat.

Mr. Faqih, who is heading a delegation of 21 officials at

the two-day talks, declined to release the text of his speech.

"He said Saudi Arabia was hoping for a smooth accession," one trade source told Reuters. "He said that economic diversification was vital to their economy."

Saudi Arabia's non-oil manufacturing sector is still only a small part of its economy, according to the commerce minister.

Saudi Arabia applied in July 1993 to the WTO's predecessor body, the General Session. "It is evident that Saudi Arabia is very welcome in this institution," Maimoun Kurdi, Saudi

undersecretary for foreign affairs, is also taking part in the WTO talks.

"It is important. It is a question of marketing our petrochemicals which face a lot of trade restrictions in various European countries as well as in the United States," one Saudi diplomat told Reuters.

In December, the Gulf state of Qatar accepted a package accord on WTO membership, clearing the way for it to join Bahrain and Kuwait in the new body. Negotiations took 18 months.

The United Arab Emirates joined last month.

Israeli shekel likely to fall after election

TEL AVIV (R) — The Israeli shekel is likely to fall after the May 29 general election because of expected budget cuts and low interest rates, analysts and foreign currency dealers say.

Most agree that irrespective of which party wins — the ruling Labour Party or the right-wing Likud — the new government will introduce economic measures that will lead the currency to trade lower.

"The new government will have to introduce an economic plan that includes budget cuts," said Motti Shushan, head of Bank Leumi's foreign currency dealing room. He believes this will spark a devaluation of the shekel.

"It will take a day or two, a month or two, but eventually the market forces will decide," he said.

But not all economists believe the government's measures will be drastic. Prachia Bar Shavit, chief economist at Bank Hapoalim, said a moderate plan is most likely, one that will include lower interest rates and a two-

billion shekel budget cut.

Analysts say an administered devaluation by the central bank would not be effective. Rather, lower interest rates and budget cuts will bring about a natural weakening of the shekel.

"Once this process starts there is no way it can be stopped," Mr. Shushan said. "The public is acting like a flock of sheep and everybody will rush to buy foreign currency at once."

A ballooning current account deficit in the balance of payments is proof a devaluation is needed, analysts argue.

In 1995, the Israeli government set a budget deficit target of 2.75 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) and the deficit was 3.5 per cent of GDP. This year's target is 2.5 per cent of GDP but officials estimate that without the cuts the deficit will be 3.0 per cent or more of GDP.

Exporters say the shekel-dollar exchange rate, broadly unchanged over the last three years, is hurting Israel's trade performance.

Despite repeated calls for a devaluation to make Israeli exports more competitive, Bank of Israel Governor Jacob Frenkel has ruled out an administered devaluation.

At a recent news conference Dr. Frenkel declared: "No German industrialist would ask the Bundesbank to devalue the mark. The only way we can lower the shekel's value is by printing money, which we will not do."

The central bank has indicated it will let market forces determine the shekel's value and has not intervened in foreign exchange trading since January.

Until recently the main beneficiaries of a strong shekel were corporations that took out foreign currency linked loans, the volume of which more than doubled last year.

Experts warn these companies may pay a high price in case of a sharp decline in the shekel.

"I would not sleep well at night if I was exposed in foreign currency linked loans," Mr. Shushan said.

Some indicators already

show the market expects the shekel to decline. Foreign currency credits of the private sector fell, albeit moderately, in March for the first time in the last two years.

Figures published by the monetary department of the Bank of Israel show the private sector reduced its foreign currency credits from Israeli banks by 30 million shekels to 40.57 billion shekels against 40.60 billion in February.

Another indication is that since the beginning of April the shekel has lost almost three per cent against the dollar.

During the next months the dollar could easily push up to 3.30 shekels, against a current level of 3.19, said one analyst.

Kohl says deep welfare cuts needed to tackle joblessness

BONN (AFP) — Chancellor Helmut Kohl halved forecast growth of the German economy to 0.75 per cent Friday in a statement underlining the case for radical cuts in welfare and putting further downward pressure on the mark.

Mr. Kohl said that the restructuring of the welfare system was needed urgently in a statement to parliament the day after his coalition government agreed the tough package after much difficulty and in the face of opposition from trade unions.

He said that deep cuts in welfare spending and measures to support business were necessary to combat unemployment. This, he said, was Germany's priority national policy aim.

Mr. Kohl also said he expected the economy to grow by only 0.75 per cent this year. The government had said in its report on the economy in January that gross domestic product would grow by 1.5 per cent this year.

"However we are not expecting a recession in Germany," he told parliament. Most experts predicted a revival in the second half of the year although this would translate into positive figures only on 1997, the chancellor said.

Mr. Kohl has launched what amounts to a radical reform of the welfare partnership in industry which has been considered as the foundation of the so-called German economic "miracle" since World War II.

Opposition Social Democrat leader Oskar Lafontaine accused the Kohl government of "election fraud" for waiting until after important regional elections last month to come out with the package, which he described as a "programme against workers."

Referring to trade union leaders who had offered to moderate their demands and cooperate in an "alliance for jobs," he told Mr. Kohl: "You have spat in the hand which they stretched out to you." The SPD presented its own counter-plan calling notably for higher taxes on energy. Mr. Lafontaine agreed with the government's assessment of the economic situation but said the programme was "socially totally awry."

Mr. Kohl said that unemployment had reached an unacceptable level. "Stopping and reducing joblessness, that is the most important German home policy aim," he said.

People had to adapt and act in their demands. "I know this can be hard. But the unavoidable correctives are the only way to strengthen our economy, to make more jobs possible and lay a good future basis for our social security system," Mr. Kohl said.

The chancellor said a third of the national product went on social services, that German workers had shorter hours, longer holidays and higher pensions than workers almost anywhere else.

In order to create more jobs, Germany had to be made more attractive to investors. Burdens on the economy had to be reduced, taxes, social contributions and labour costs lowered, superfluous regulations removed, innovations introduced more rapidly and the labour market made more flexible.

"Our jobs exist in a situation of international competition."

When production in Germany becomes too expensive, it shifts abroad to the detriment of jobs or goes under completely," Mr. Kohl said, while welcoming growing German investment in other countries.

JOHANNESBURG (R) — The U.N. Trade and Development Conference (UNCTAD) must work to ensure the least developed countries are speedily integrated in the world economy, U.S. Vice-President Al Gore said Thursday.

In a video address to the ninth UNCTAD conference, Mr. Gore paid tribute to former U.S. commerce secretary, Ron Brown, who died in a plane crash in Croatia last month, saying he would have led the U.S. delegation to the UNCTAD meeting.

"I want to share what I know would have been his priority goal for this critical meeting — to speed the integration of the developing world into the world trading system... In conjunction with sound environmental and economic strategies," Mr. Gore said in the message to the 2,500 delegates on the third day of the two-week meeting.

He said the United States has "close and cooperative relations" with both South Africa and UNCTAD and he welcomed South Africa's "resumption of leadership in the U.N. system."

U.S. delegate Melinda Kimble told the conference that after agreement on the United States' budget this week the United States will pay "in full" its regular 1995 contribution to the United Nations easing the immediate cash-flow crisis.

At the start of the

U.N. must work for world economic integration — Gore

UNCTAD conference there was widespread concern that the United States would seek to pull out of some U.N. agencies. Last month the United Nations announced it had run out of money for daily running expenses.

The U.N. total budget is some \$2.6 billion plus peacekeeping contributions, but it is owed \$2.8 billion from member states. The U.S., the largest debtor, owes \$1.5 billion and Russia owes \$400 million.

Ms. Kimble said the U.S. saw three distinct functions for UNCTAD — economic analysis, "policy dialogue that emphasises the sharing of experiences" and technical cooperation.

Although UNCTAD Secretary General Rubens Ricupero had taken a positive step with the reorganisation of the secretariat, "this alone cannot generate the long-term savings needed to free up resources to reinvest in specific UNCTAD activities," she said.

Addressing concerns among developing countries that many were becoming marginalised by the trend to global markets, Ms. Kimble said it was those countries with the most open, liberalised economies which grew most from 1980 to

1994. She said developing countries grew 3.9 per cent a year from 1990-94, more than twice as fast as developed countries. Their exports grew "impressively" with the U.S. imports from developing countries growing 40 per cent from 1991-94 to reach nearly \$300 billion.

Ms. Kimble said UNCTAD had to do more than survive. "Survival is not what we are about. We want the success of UNCTAD, it has to meet the challenge of a globalised world."

HOROSCOPE FORECAST FOR SATURDAY, MAY 4, 1996

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) You have every opportunity to acquire the data you need today which can be utilised in business so that you can command greater abundance. Later tonight, you can proceed on a special project with the assistance of a bigwig.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Use tact in handling fellow business associates who may have quite a different attitude today. Handle public affairs efficiently in such a manner that you will gain the success and prestige from those in authority.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You can make your surroundings more efficient running and attractive today with relative ease. Later this evening is especially beneficial for any new project or special endeavour which you are involved in at this time.

MOON CHILDREN: (June 22 to July 21) Plan the recreations you want to indulge in early today, however avoid a fellow associate whose sense of humour "is almost nil. Later this evening you can plan some special occasion for your mate and loved ones.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Get busy and make your home more charming today and be sure the plumbing is working properly. Later tonight, avoid a family scuffle which could result in some a difficult situation for your loved ones.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Communicate intelligently with others can prove most advantageous today so make the best of any good situation. Make sure you drive carefully while on the highway, especially with your loved ones in the vehicle.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) You understand just how to make your possessions more valuable at this time, so get busy on this. Plan a workable budget for those who live under your roof so that the needs of your loved ones are satisfied.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Personal wishes can easily be gained today because you feel and look charming. Steer clear of a fellow associate who depresses you and by doing so you can achieve the recognition and success you are after.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Be cagey when seeing an expert today and get the right information you are seeking. Spend spare time later this evening with one who charms you and who you feel comfortable in the company of at this time.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) An expert can advise you today how to have the best time with your loved ones at little expense. Gain your secret desires later this evening with the assistance of some knowledgeable and prosperous individual.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) This is a good day today to find out exactly what your position is with bigwigs who can give you a chance to show your ability in any projects which you are given. Later tonight you should spend some time with your loved ones.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) Be wide awake today to new ways and means through which you can advance more quickly in your career activities. Later tonight is a good time to go out on the town with close friends and your loved ones.

Birthstone of May: Emerald — Citrine

THE Daily Crossword by Mary Brindamoor

ACROSS

- Bistros
- Vegas machine
- Fellow
- Come up
- Cod's cousin
- Mad
- Fire truck adjunct
- Arkin or Alda
- Asian land
- Owens
- "Semper paratus"
- Demolish
- Charged atom
- Did the fox trot
- Peter or Paul
- Makes publishable
- "Common Sense" author
- Swiss river
- Water plant
- Knightly titles
- Alphabet run
- Cheer word
- Choir voices
- Lugged
- Pavarotti, for one
- Blackened, in a way
- Edge
- Take for — (deceive)
- From time to time
- Health farm
- Ms. Minnelli
- Once, once
- Hillock
- Early hours, to poets
- Hernando de
- Flynn of films
- Blind item
- Nine inches in London
- Dilapidated

Yesterday's puzzle solved

DOWN

- Musical Johnny
- Diva's song
- Play opener
- Natives: suff.
- Legislative
- groups
- Serape
- After ooh and tra
- Approve
- Stresses
- Lawyer's customer
- Circle dance
- USNA word: abbr.
- Horse
- Certain wine
- Eight: pref.
- Treasured
- Part of AES
- Burr or Copland
- Mud and apple
- Final source of aid
- Restaurant patron
- Pocket bread
- Ned Beatty film
- Slender quality
- Way
- Inter-
- Logician
- Thoroughgoing
- Magnon
- Trees
- Stranged instrument
- Poet Pound
- Let go
- Thin Man's dog
- Scheme
- Friend
- Gun go.



Al Gore

that after agreement on the United States' budget this week the United States will pay "in full" its regular 1995 contribution to the United Nations easing the immediate cash-flow crisis.

At the start of the

THE BETTER HALF. By Glasbergen

"I tried real hard to create a low-fat alternative to macaroni and cheese. It's macaroni and air."

Peanuts

GRAMPA WENT TO THE AQUARIUM YESTERDAY...

HE GOT IN WITH A SENIOR TICKET.

WHAT DID THAT MEAN?

HE COULD ONLY LOOK AT OLD FISH...

Andy Capp

ONLY IF YOU ASKED ME!

JUST FORTUNE TOLD ME IT WAS A GOOD IDEA TO ASK YOU!

MIND YOU, I'D OPEN MY EYES BEFORE I'D BEEN KICKED UP!

Mutt'n'Jeff

MY CAR STALLED, FRIEND! ALL I NEED IS A LITTLE PUSH TO GET IT STARTED. WILL YOU?

OH SURE! GLAD TO HELP!

WHAM!

OFFICER, HE RAN RIGHT SMACK INTO MY CAR! DRIVERS LIKE THAT SHOULD BE CALED!

Foreigners take over a bit more of corporate Canada

OTTAWA (AFP) — Foreign companies have tightened their grip on corporate Canada and they have done it by beating domestic competitors at the business of making money.

Statistics Canada says 28.4 per cent of corporate revenues were generated by foreign-controlled firms in 1994, up 0.4 of a percentage point from 1993.

The share of assets controlled by foreigners has remained relatively stable since 1988 at about 20.5 per cent, the federal agency said in a report.

But foreign control as measured by revenues has risen every year since 1989.

Statistics Canada linked the pattern to the concentration of foreign investment dollars in the export sector, by far the hottest part of the economy.

The agency said three-quarters of the increase in foreign control in 1994 came from companies that make and export such things as cars, wood pulp, metals, chemicals and food products.

By focusing on these thriving businesses, foreign-controlled companies have managed to boost revenues by 25 per cent since 1991.

That is just over double the rate of increase for domestically controlled firms.

Pakistan bank privatisation attempt bounces

ISLAMABAD (AFP) — A first bank privatisation attempt by the government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto appears to be on hold following a sudden takeover of its management by Pakistan's central bank.

The takeover of the United Bank Limited (UBL) by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) followed problems in a recent deal to transfer the bank to the control of a Saudi Arabian concern, Bashrahil Limited.

The deal to sell a 26 per cent stake in UBL along with transfer of its management to the Saudi company has been called off, a prominent Pakistani financial daily, Business Recorder, said. Bashrahil is unwilling to commit enough funds to shore up the ailing bank troubled by sharp deterioration in its liquidity position, the daily said.

But an official at the State Privatisation Commission said no final decision had been taken and that negotiations with the prospective Saudi buyers were still on.

The UBL is the first state-owned bank sought to be privatised by the 30-month-old Bhutto government. Another large bank — Habib Bank Limited — is also on the privatisation list, alongside the lucrative telecom services.

The government has meanwhile begun selling off thermal power generation stations to the private sector.

The Allied Bank and Muslim Commercial Bank were privatised during the 1990-1993 prime ministership of Nawaz Sharif, now the main opposition leader.

"The overall privatisation programme has been going on smoothly," a privatisation commission consultant, Mudassar Khan, told AFP.

Some 30 industrial units have been sold to the private sector by the present government, mainly those making cement, fertiliser and engineering goods, he noted.

The UBL, with estimated assets of about \$5 billion has more than 1,600 branches and 22,000 employees, but has been marred by losses due to the heavy burden of bad loans and administrative costs, Business Recorder said.

The state bank takeover may ward off a likely run on the UBL because of its acute liquidity problem, analysts said.

Already, two UBL account holders have gone to court challenging the plan to privatise it.

SBP Governor Mohammad Yaqub told a news conference that the takeover was aimed at reassuring the depositors that their interests were now better protected.

A new management, has assumed control of the UBL to ensure its profitability by recovering loans, reducing administrative expenses and improving its operations, he said.

Mr. Yaqub insisted that the takeover would "neither impede nor speed up" the privatisation process of the UBL, but officials in Habib Bank saw it as a derailment of the UBL sale.

The governor said, the move would serve as a signal to other state-owned financial institutions to set their house in order. He has often criticised mismanagement, inefficiency, imprudent lending and rising administrative costs of the nationalised commercial banks.

The state-run banking sector has been plagued in the past by politically-motivated lending against inadequate guarantees.

Airlines report strong passenger growth in 1996

GENEVA (R) — The world's major airlines have reported strong passenger growth during the first three months of 1996, setting them on the path for a second year of record profits despite a sharp slowdown in cargo traffic.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) said passenger traffic — which provides the bulk of revenue — was up on average by 10 per cent over the same period last year and in March surged by 12 per cent.

Cargo, which had been advancing strongly and well-ahead of passenger growth since 1994, increased only two per cent over the first quarter, and in March was

only one per cent up on the figure for the same month last year.

But IATA Director-General Pierre Jeannot said that overall the figures from the body's 234-member airlines — representing 98 per cent of international business — "show an excellent first quarter and are a good omen for the summer season."

IATA officials said the returns indicated a forecast by Mr. Jeannot last month that 1996 would bring an overall and all-time record profit of \$6 billion — after the previous record of \$5.2 billion in 1995 — was well on line to be met.

A \$6 billion total this year added to last year's advance and a smaller profit in 1994 would mean IATA airlines — which include many unprofitable companies as well as successful ones — would have recovered 85 per cent of their 1990-93 losses.

Industry analysts said the cargo slowdown had been expected after the sharp advance of well over 20 per cent growth in 1994-95. "It could not keep on at those rates," said one.

The analyst noted that two thirds of cargo transported on scheduled flights went on board passenger planes, which

meant that as aircraft were carrying more people and personal baggage there was less room for freight.

The IATA figures showed scheduled international passenger services were flying in March with 70 per cent of seats occupied, three per cent up on March last year, and an average of 67 per cent for the whole first quarter.

Seat supply, or the increase in passenger capacity as new aircraft come into service, grew by only eight per cent in the first quarter — at two per cent behind passenger growth a further sign of a healthier trend in the industry.

Britain's grid finds Saudi billionaire

LONDON (R) — Britain's national grid said Thursday it had had a "constructive and satisfactory" meeting with Middle Eastern investment company The Olayan Group which has an interest in 12.5 per cent of its shares.

The grid, which runs the electricity transmission network, had been trying to make "human contact" with Saudi financier Sulaiman Saleh Olayan since his privately-held company gained its interest via a hedging contract with brokers HSBC James Capel.

"David Jones, group chief executive and John Utley, group finance director, this afternoon met senior executives of the Olayan Group," a company spokesman told Reuters by telephone.

"It was a constructive and

satisfactory meeting and it is anticipated that a further statement will be made in the near future," he said.

While the exact nature of Olayan's interest remains unclear, James Capel has said only that it protected its market position with a "structured transaction" with Olayan's German subsidiary, Crescent Holdings, after buying Anglo-American conglomerate Hanson's grid stake for 405 million pounds (\$607 million).

Since James Capel's announcement Tuesday, the grid has served 212 notices — a company law under which parties with shares in a public company have to divulge details of their stakes — to Hanson, HSBC James Capel and Olayan's offices in London, Germany and

Athens, Greece.

James Capel has confused matters by announcing that it holds a 12.18 per cent stake in the grid as a market maker, making some analysts wonder whether it may just unwind the position gradually in the future.

However, some have speculated that Olayan may effectively own the stake through an over-the-counter options deal.

"This is a significant for a house that is only just getting into market making — and strange in that regard," said Bill Dale, utilities analyst at brokers SBC Warburg.

"I think basically it feels like there should be something more but there's no evidence for it at the moment. All we know is that Capel bought a large line of

stock and has hedged it as you would any line of stock," he added.

Companies not involved in Britain's electricity market are only allowed to build stakes of up to 15 per cent in the grid.

The grid ships power from the wholesale electricity market into homes, offices and factories, owns 5,000 miles of cable, more than 20,000 pylons and runs the "pool" — the wholesale electricity market.

The Olayan Group has strong ties with Saudi Arabia but is based in Athens. Founded and chaired by Mr. Sulaiman Olayan, the group was established in 1947 and embraces over 30 businesses and financial enterprises in the Middle East and throughout the world.

Rent soars as Beijing commercialises housing

BEIJING (R) — Monthly rents in China's capital Beijing are set to soar this year as the government pursues its goal of phasing out huge subsidies on housing and commercialising property, officials have said.

Rent for the highly-subsidised public sector, which houses most urban residents, was set to rise to 1.30 yuan (\$0.16) per square metre in 1996, up by 49 per cent compared with 0.87 yuan (\$0.10) in 1995, Chen Xuebin, head of the leading group for the reform of the housing system, said by telephone.

The rent rise was an important part of China's housing reform that aims to improve housing quality, stimulate the market and move rents toward the marketplace, Mr. Chen said.

However, China needs to accelerate housing reform, seen by economists as a cru-

cial step in Beijing's shift from unwieldy central planning and subsidies toward a market economy.

China plans to increase prices of public housing to 15 per cent of average monthly incomes by 2000, up from seven per cent in 1995, Mr. Chen said.

Monthly rent will be raised to 1.80 yuan (\$0.22) per square metre in 1997 with a goal of 3.86 yuan (\$0.47) per square metre by 2000, he said.

"The transition to cost-based and market-based rent should be speeded up," Mr. Chen said.

China's 250 million urban residents lived in per capita space of 7.9 square metres at the end of 1995 and the government hopes to boost that to 9.0 square metres by the end of the century, officials have said.

The rent increases should also help to solve the prob-

lem of lack of funds for housing maintenance, Mr. Chen said.

"Raising rents will enable property owners to improve maintenance, which in turn will mean the value of properties will rise," he said.

China is selling the rent increase to consumers, calling it a "virtuous circle" that will ultimately benefit residents.

Increased state revenue from higher rents would be ploughed back into construction of residential housing, which is in short supply in China's crowded cities, Mr. Chen said.

Higher rents should also spur interest in buying housing.

"The government wants to monetise wages so that people receive all their wages in cash and not partly in kind, which includes subsidised rents from employers, offi-

cial have said. Authorities spend 100 billion yuan (\$12 billion) a year on building subsidised housing, officials have said.

But with huge government subsidies it is cheaper to rent public housing than it is to buy it and the prospect of higher profits from more expensive rentals or sales has meant private investors have shown little interest in building low-cost residential housing.

Rent rises would be staggered for some, with low-income households and the elderly paying rent of up to five per cent of income, with the remainder covered by their employer, Mr. Chen said.

Recipients of unemployment benefit could apply to have their rent waived, he said.

DAILY BEAT

A review of news from the Arabic press

Arab Contractors Company resumes construction operations after being put on right financial track

★ ★ HANI NASER, board chairman of the Arab Contractors (ARCON) Company, told the general assembly that the firm had overcome the main problems it faced during the past two years and had settled most of its debts. He said that the company was now put on the right financial track and that it had managed to resume construction work by winning a JD 1.98 million contract from the Telecommunications Corporation. The work, which is in Mafrq Governorate and comprises digging and extending telephone cables and wires, is about 70 per cent done, Mr. Naser said noting that the company had collected JD 1.15 million from the project owners until the end of 1995. Based on this project, Mr. Naser said, the company was able to rebuild its fixed assets which at the end of last year totalled JD 202,284. Total current assets amounted to JD 606,755. The company is currently studying the possibilities and means to increase the capital. It is also seeking to obtain a first degree classification as many private projects are available in this sphere (Al Aswaq and Al Dustour).

Jordan Trade Facilities Company seeks dealership of a car firm

★ ★ JORDAN TRADE Facilities Company (JTFC) boosted its gross earnings last year to JD 547,800 from JD 142,700 in 1994 and the general assembly decided to roll over the net profit of JD 144,200 to cover part of the JD 1.2 million of accumulated losses of previous years. Board chairman Nabil Abul Huda told the general assembly that JTFC had cooperated with the Jordan Financial Investments Company in building the jointly-owned Al Liwan Hotel and the commercial compound. He said that both companies are working on setting up an entity that would own the hotel and the compound and would manage it independently from the two parties. "Such an arrangement would insure freedom, flexibility and all opportunities for the success of the new company," Mr. Abul Huda added. Noting that the JTFC has intensified its overseas contacts to obtain the dealership of a car company, Mr. Abul Huda indicated that the company continued in 1995 to develop its main activity of selling cars in instalments and, as such, has increased its receivables by 63 per cent from JD 803,100 in 1994 JD 1.31 million last year. Deferred earnings, amounting to JD 217,600, also increased by 51 per cent. Total assets improved by 2.7 per cent as they rose to JD 3.68 million and shareholders equity went up by five per cent to JD 2.99 million.

The board chairman referred to the court case against the Construction Equipment Centre to recover debts owed to JTFC and pointed out that the owner of the centre had pledged to cover 50 per cent of the bad debts which the company may not recover from centre's clients. Furthermore, JTFC is filing a suit to annual all sale deals between the company and the owner of the centre and to have him return more than JD 2 million of funds (Al Ra'i and Al Aswaq).

Financial Markets

Market	USD/C	JD/C	Market	USD/C	JD/C
Gold	595.05	0.88	Silver	5.39	0.100

Currency	Bid	Offer
U.S. Dollar	0.7080	0.7100
British Pound	1.0645	1.0596
Deutsche Mark	0.4401	0.4424
Swiss Franc	0.5655	0.5683
French Franc	0.1363	0.1370
Japanese Yen*	0.8718	0.8757
Dutch Guilder	0.4113	0.4134
Swedish Krona	0.0453	0.0455
Belgian Franc	0.0453	0.0455

Currency	Bid	Offer
Israeli Sheqel	1.8820	1.8780
Lebanese Lira*	0.044585	0.044935
Saudi Riyal	0.1870	0.1895
Kuwaiti Dinar	2.3670	2.3670
Qatari Riyal	0.1932	0.1945
Egyptian Pound	0.2090	0.2100
Omani Riyal	1.8380	1.8410
UAE Dirham	0.1922	0.1933
Greek Drachma*	0.8775	0.8885
Cypriot Pound	1.4915	1.5250

LONDON EXCHANGE RATES

LONDON (R) — Following are the buying and selling rates for leading world currencies and gold against the dollar on the London foreign exchange and bullion markets Friday.

One U.S. dollar	1.3616/26	Canadian dollar
1.5240/50		Deutsche marks
1.7036/46		Dutch guilders
1.2410/20		Swiss francs
31.36/40		Belgian francs
5.1578/28		French francs
1561.4/2.9		Italian lire
104.47/57		Japanese yen
6.8270/70		Swedish crowns
6.5580/30		Norwegian crowns
5.8810/60		Danish crowns
1.4015/25		Singapore dollars
0.7953/58		Australian dollars
7.7350/60		Hong Kong dollars
One sterling	\$1.5040/50	
Gold (ounce)	\$394.30/394.80	

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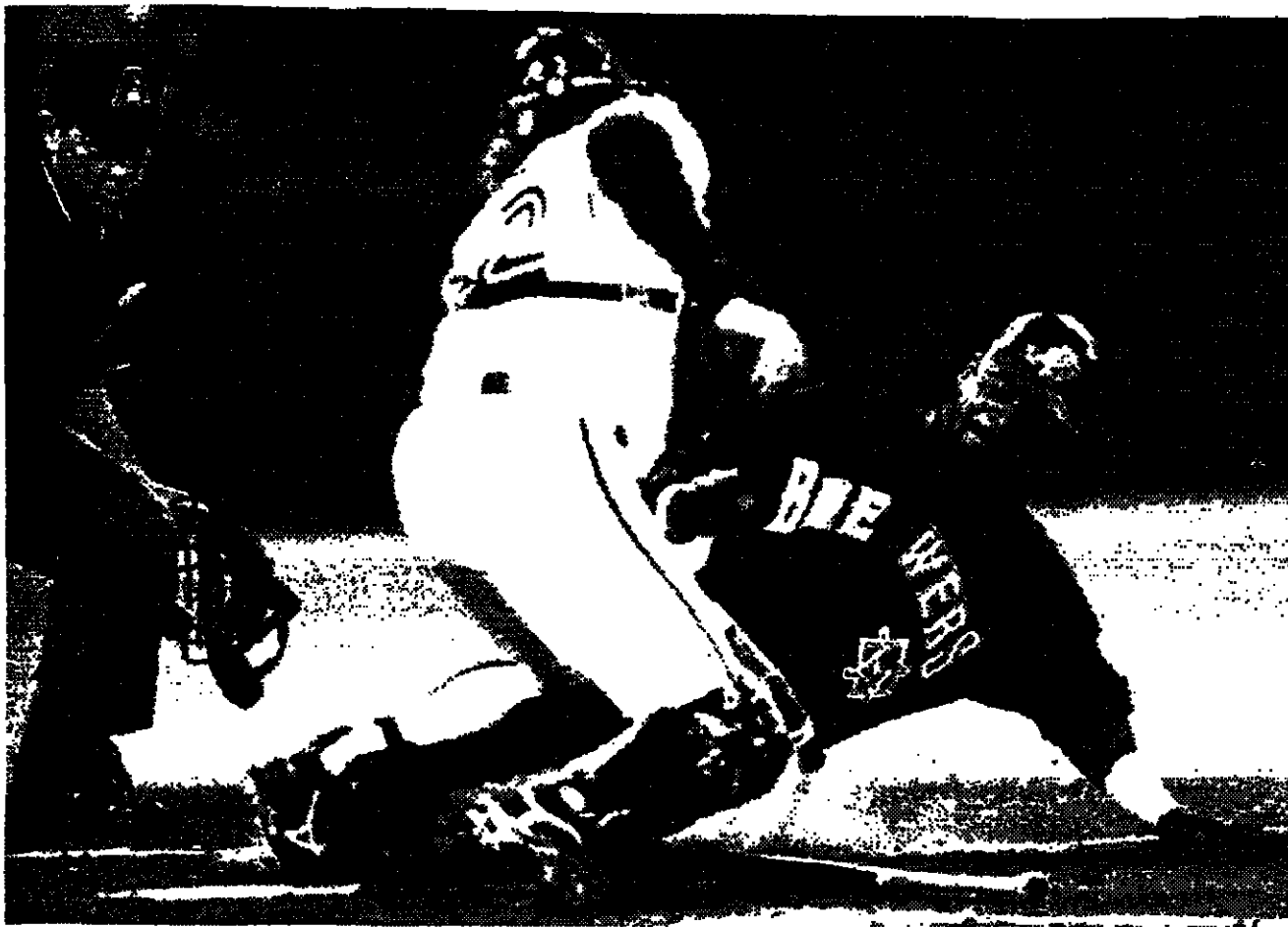
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Umpire Dave Phillips looks in as Toronto Blue Jay's catcher Charlie O'Brien blocks the plate but is unable to hang onto the ball, allowing Milwaukee Brewer's Greg Vaughn to

score from 3rd on a bunt single by Pat Listach May 2. The Jays and Brewers played their final game of a three game series May 2 in Toronto (Reuters photo)

Blue Jays finish sweep of Brewers

TORONTO (AP) — Charlie O'Brien hit a two-run home run Thursday and Joe Carter tripled, doubled and drove in a run, leading the Toronto Blue Jays to a 7-5 victory and a three-game series sweep of the Milwaukee Brewers.

After Jose Valentin hit his fourth home run of the season, a solo shot to right for a 4-3 Brewers' lead in the top

of the sixth. Carter doubled with one out in the bottom of the sixth and scored on Juan Samuel's two-out triple.

Robert Perez followed with a soft liner to left to score Samuel and O'Brien walked to chase loser Scott Kart (2-2). Alex Gonzalez singled off Marshall Boze to score for a 6-4 Blue Jays lead.

Erik Hanson (3-4) gave up

five runs, four earned on four hits over 6 2/3 innings. He struck out eight and walked five, leaving with the bases loaded with two out in the seventh. Reliever Giovanni Carrara walked Greg Vaughn, cutting the Blue Jays lead to 6-5 before Brian Bohanon got Valentin to

ground out, ending the in-

ning. Carlos Delgado restored Toronto's two-run cushion with his eighth homer of the season, a solo shot to left for a 7-5 lead in the seventh. Mike Timlin, the Blue Jays fifth pitcher, worked the ninth for his fourth save.

Grace pitches Phils to 7th win in eight games

MIAMI (R) — Mike Grace and Ricky Bottalico combined on a five-hitter and Jim Eisenreich had an RBI single to lead the Philadelphia Phillies to a 2-0 win over the Florida Marlins in the only National League game scheduled on Thursday.

Grace (5-0) became the National League's third five-game winner and ran his

scoreless innings streak to 16 2/3 as the Phils won for the seventh time in eight games.

The 25-year-old right-hander scattered five hits over eight innings with two walks and eight strikeouts.

Grace allowed only one runner to reach third and lowered his era to 2.53. His 5-0 start is the best by a Phillies' rookie since Bob

Walk went 6-0 in 1980.

Ricky Bottalico worked a hitless ninth for his league-leading 10th save.

Florida's Kevin Brown (2-4) again received no offensive support and took the loss. He gave up one run and four hits in seven innings with no walks and six strikeouts.

Brown is fifth in the league with a 2.26 era, but the Marlins have been shut out in

three of his seven starts and have scored a combined eight runs with him on the mound.

Eisenreich's two-out infield single brought home Mark Whitten to break the scoreless tie in the top of the sixth.

The Phillies added an insurance run in the ninth when Benito Santiago pounded a leadoff triple off reliever Terry Mathews and scored on Kevin Jordan's sacrifice fly to deep center.

Magic to play next season but maybe not with Lakers

NBA champion Rockets, HOUSTON (R) — Basketball superstar Earvin "Magic" Johnson said he plans to return to the NBA next season, but maybe not to Los Angeles Lakers team that was bounced out of the playoffs in the first round on Thursday.

Frustrated by distractions that he felt took away from his team's ability to focus on the court, and stinging from the first-round defeat at the hands of the Houston Rockets, Johnson told reporters he would consider playing for other teams if the Lakers tell him their plans do not

include returning him to his old point guard position.

"There's five, six, ten other teams I know that already want me, so that's no problem, and I'll just go elsewhere," said Johnson, who came out of retirement to rejoin the Lakers in mid-season and helped the club into the playoffs.

"Right now I want to come back. I hope to be back playing," he said. "But my main thing is I want to win. I want to be like them (Houston). I don't want to be on this side, like this."

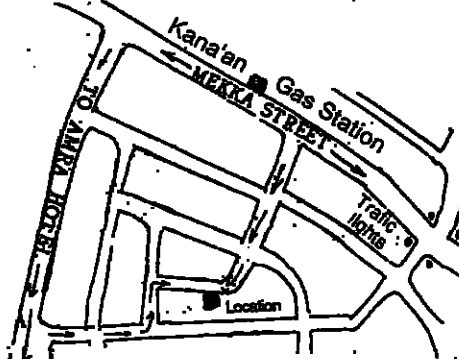
Johnson, who led the Lakers to five NBA cham-

pionships in the 1980s, was used primarily as a power forward and backup point guard since his return, but he clearly yearns to go back to running the Los Angeles offense.

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South Korea willing to accept joint-hosting of World Cup soccer

SEOUL (AP) — Hoping to end a bitter battle with Japan over who will host soccer's 2002 World Cup, South Korea said Friday it is willing to jointly host the games.

The official about-face comes with less than a month left until FIFA, soccer's world governing body, is to announce its decision. Japan and South Korea are the only countries bidding to host the 2002 World Cup.

"The South Korean government and people will accept joint-hosting if that is the wish of most member nations of FIFA," Prime Minister Lee Soo-Sung told reporters at a breakfast meeting.

"Soccer is important, but it should not result in damaging good-neighbourly relations with Japan," he said.

South Korea and Japan had shown little interest in co-hosting the games in the

past, with each country engaged in spirited bidding for the sole right to the games.

But recently, more and more South Korean officials have privately showed interest in renewed suggestions by European and Asian soccer officials that the two historical enemies co-host the games.

The competition for Asia's first ever World Cup finals has been marred by accusations of bribery and a rekindling of the rivalry between the two neighbours that dates back centuries.

Japan ruled Korea as a colony starting in 1910 until its defeat in World War II in 1945. South Koreans consider the bid to host the World Cup, in competition against Japan, a matter of national pride.

To win the bid both countries are using vast sums to build new stadiums and other facilities, and have promised to donate revenues to promote soccer.

The president of the union of European football associations proposed last month that Japan and South Korea be co-hosts. UEFA has the largest bloc of eight members on FIFA's 21-member executive committee.

The Asian Football Confederation has also made the same suggestion, but FIFA President Joao Havelange has said that joint-hosting was against FIFA rules.

Also Friday, the national news agency Yonhap reported that Kim Yoon-Hwan, a senior leader of the ruling New Korea party, was expected to discuss the co-hosting idea with Japanese politicians when he visits Tokyo next week.

Kim was to meet with Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, Ichiro Ozawa, the leader of the main opposition new frontier party, and former

Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita, who, with Kim, leads a Japan-South Korea parliamentarians group.

Separately, the Seoul government, reacting to renewed international criticism over the eating of dog meat in South Korea, said Friday it will do its best to curb dog consumption during the World Cup if South Korea becomes host.

Eating dog meat is illegal in South Korea, but the law is often violated, and dog stew is readily available at many back-alley specialty stores.

Brigitte Bardot, animal rights activist and former French sex symbol, has demanded that the Korean practice be banned during the World Cup finals.

"We will do our best to stop the practice and inform the people," an official at the South Korean culture ministry said, requesting anonymity.



The commemorative stamps for the 1996 Olympics are unveiled in Washington May 2 by Olympic medalists Evelyn Ashford and Mitch Gaylord (right). The 20 new stamps will go on sale May 3 (Reuters photo)

Eddery could land classic double

LONDON (R) — Irishman Pat Eddery could land a dream double in the first two classics of the season this weekend.

The unbeaten filly Bosra Sham is virtually unbackable in Sunday's 1,000 Guineas while the tough colt Storm Trooper could spring a surprise in Saturday's 2,000 Guineas.

"This is the best chance I have ever had for the 1,000 Guineas," Eddery said after Bosra Sham trotted up in her first race as a three-year-old.

"The marvellous thing is she just doesn't have a chink in her armour."

Despite bruising a foot in a training setback, Bosra Sham looks set to land the odds of 5-2 on with one bookmaker complaining: "People think she can win the race on three legs."

Sheikh Hamdan Al Maktoum is keen to ensure the race is not turned into a walkover by offering a dual challenge with Bint Shadayid, who has wintered in Dubai, and Bint Salsabil, whose Dam Salsabil won the 1,000 Guineas and Oaks.

In sharp contrast, the 2,000 Guineas is a wide-open race now that the bubble of Alhaarth's invincibility has been burst.

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♥ 10 4
♦ Q 10 4
♣ 9 4 3

WEST
♠ 3 8 7
♥ A K Q 9 7 3 2
♦ 9
♣ 8 5

EAST
♠ Void
♥ 8
♦ K J 8 7 5 2
♣ K J 10 7 6 2

SOUTH
♠ A K Q 10 9 5
♥ 10 5
♦ A 6 3
♣ A K

The bidding:
WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
4♠ Pass Pass Pass 4♠

Opening lead: King of ♣
Every once in a while we come across a hand of rare beauty. This hand was analyzed perfectly by the great British writer Terence Reese. The auction needs little comment. With seven probable playing tricks, West opened in accordance with the Rule of Two and Three as this vulnerability, but could not shut South out of the auction. At four spades there were nine sure tricks, and the only chance to set up a 10th was in diamonds.

West attacked with three high hearts, declarer taking care to ruff the third with the nine of trumps.

Trumps were drawn in three rounds, and declarer then obtained an almost complete count of the hand by cashing the ace and king of clubs. When West followed to all those tricks, 12 of the defender's cards were known. South could now make the contract if West's 13th card was either the king, jack or nine of diamonds.

Declarer led a low diamond and, when West produced the nine, declarer ducked in dummy! East could not afford to overtake without setting up a finesse position in diamonds for declarer, so West was left on lead, trapped in an endplay. If East overtook and returns a club, declarer ruffs high, enters dummy by leading the five of spades to the six and then leads the queen of diamonds for a finesse. On the fourth heart return, declarer ruffed in dummy and discarded a diamond from hand, and lost only two heart tricks and a diamond.

Note that the end position became possible only because declarer had the foresight to ruff the third heart with the nine!

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REVIEW

World Press Freedom Day is marked with voices of concern

By P.V. Vivekanand
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Protection for journalists in exercising the freedom of the press is key theme for this year's world press freedom day that was observed Friday, with strong condemnation of states oppressing the press and calls for end to killings, assaults, detentions and harassment of journalists around the globe.

In messages and reports released to mark World Press Freedom Day, the United Nations as well as various press groups around the world focused on the perils facing journalists either as a result of their work in covering conflict areas or their defence of the right to inform and be informed.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) went one step ahead, naming "10 worst enemies of the press." Leading the names for the second straight year was the leader of the extremist Armed Islamic Group of Algeria, which has claimed responsibility for the most of the dozens of assassinations of journalists there since 1993.

Others named by the CPJ included the leaders of China, Nigeria, Turkey, Tajikistan, Indonesia, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Kenya and Slovakia.

Reporters Sans Frontiers (Reporters Without Border, a Paris-based organisation, said three quarters of all journalists killed in 1995 were in Africa, mainly in Algeria.

The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) came under specific fire from the organisation. "Since Yasser Arafat came to power in June 1994, no fewer than 40 journalists have been 'legally' arrested" by the PNA's intelligence service, it said.

"The official attitude towards the private press and the public media during the first free (Palestinian) elections in January 1996 casts doubts on the likelihood that the situation will improve soon," Reporters Sans Frontiers said.

United Nations Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali said in a message marking World Press Freedom Day: "More people in more countries are voicing their desire for greater participation in their societies as well as a role in achieving sustainable economic and social development and a better life for all."

"Their true protector is a free press, a vigilant, responsible defender of the right of people to inform and be informed."

Dr. Ghali paid tribute to

"the many brave journalists who have died or been imprisoned in the defence of this precious freedom."

"Those who risk danger to report the news are on the frontline in defending all the freedoms to which the United Nations is dedicated," he added.

Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF) on Friday released an annual Report on Freedom of the Press Throughout the World dealing with 149 countries.

According to RSF, one of the strongest watchdogs of freedom of press, said that in some countries — Ghana, Haiti, Mozambique, the Philippines, Togo, Ukraine and Yemen — the situation improved in 1995 but in others — Algeria, Bangladesh, Burundi, Gambia, Indonesia, Nigeria, Serbia and Rwanda — it worsened.

"In other countries, little has changed," said RSF. It named those countries as Burma, China, Cuba, Iran, Iraq, the former Soviet Union, Tunisia and Vietnam, "where journalism is still a very dangerous profession."

According to figures compiled by RSF, 51 journalists were killed in line of their work in 1995 (22 of them in Algeria alone, raising the total to 56 since 1993) compared with 103 around the world in

1994; but the situation remains nonetheless perilous for journalists.

It said 386 journalists were imprisoned in 1995, and 102 were still being held as of Dec. 31, 1995.

RSF said: "The use of legislation to stifle press freedom and, to an even greater extent, the widespread growth of impunity are among the threats journalists have to face nowadays."

The group named Romania, Congo, Zambia and Egypt as countries where the regimes, "on the pretext of updating press law..." have introduced "repressive legislation that enables them to restrict journalists' freedom with the blessing of the courts."

The RSF report itself did not spare Western countries in its criticism. "Even in Western democracies the protection of press freedoms requires constant vigilance and effort," it said, and named Britain and Spain among violators.

"Violence from right-wing extremists in France, Germany and Austria and nationalist movements in the Spanish Basque country and Corsica is another obstacle to the press," it said, citing specific incidents of attacks on several journalists in these countries.

Israelis, Palestinians pay last respects to Habibi

NAZARETH (AFP) — Israel Culture Minister Shulamit Aloni and her Palestinian counterpart Yasser Arafat joined around 2,000 people Friday to bid a final farewell to Israel's best known Arab author Emile Habibi.

"We have lost a basic pillar of the struggle for a just peace and the rights of the Palestinian people," said Mr. Arafat in a speech to a memorial service in Nazareth.

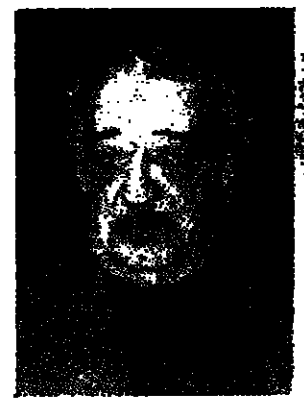
Habibi, whose work grappled with the pain and humour of being an Arab in the Jewish state, died Thursday aged 74 after a long

battle with cancer. He was the "father of Palestinian culture," Mr. Arafat added.

The service was followed by a burial in Haifa.

Ms. Aloni also paid tribute to the prize-winning author as "a great fighter for peace and brotherhood between neighbours in this land and with neighbouring countries."

The main eulogy came from leading Palestinian poet and former Culture Minister Mahmoud Darwish who told AFP he had come to say "hello and farewell" to Habibi, one of the "guardians" of the Palestinian people. "He



Emile Habibi

was a major voice of this land. His body will become a tree.

Mr. Darwish had been due to meet up with Mr. Habibi on Friday in Nazareth as part of a television documentary being made on the author's life, and had already got special permission to travel to Israel from the Israeli authorities because they "had an appointment today."

Habibi, a Communist Party deputy in Israel's parliament from 1952-1977, was best known among both Arab and Jewish Israelis for his humorous but biting novel "The Peacemaker," which won him the Israel prize, the Jewish state's top literary

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Qatar Justice Minister Najib Al Naimi (right) is escorted past the Dome of the Rock Mosque as he tours holy sites in Jerusalem on Friday (Reuters photo)

Qatar minister prays at Al Aqsa Mosque

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Qatar's Justice Minister Najib Mohammed Al Naimi took part in Friday prayers at the Al Aqsa Mosque, one of the holiest sites in Islam.

Mr. Naimi is on his first visit to the Palestinian self-rule areas and the Holy City at the invitation of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

Just after weekly prayers he held talks with Faisal Husseini, the de facto Palestinian minister for Jerusalem, at the unofficial Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) headquarters in East Jerusalem.

"This visit will help to defuse Israel's attempts to distance Qatar from the Palestinian cause," Mr. Husseini said after the meeting.

Israel has banned Palestinian diplomatic activity in the eastern sector of the Holy City.

Israeli Prime Minister Shi-

mon Peres said the minister's visit would help to "strengthen the city's unity under Israel's sovereignty."

Mr. Naimi was later to travel to the Gaza Strip to meet with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

On Thursday he visited East Jerusalem and met his Palestinian counterpart, Fehi Abu Meddein, Palestinian sources said.

"I'm a guest of the Palestinian Authority and so I don't intend to meet Israeli leaders," Mr. Naimi said as he arrived in Jericho on the West Bank.

Qatar decided in July to open a mission in the Palestinian territories and set up a holding company with a capital of \$250 million to invest in Palestinian development.

Mr. Peres became the first Israeli premier to visit Qatar when on April 2 he signed an agreement in Doha to exchange trade missions.

Aideed must be defeated — rival

MOGADISHU (R) — A military defeat of Somali clan leader General Mohammed Farah Aideed's forces in south Mogadishu is the only way to bring peace to the devastated country, General Aideed's main rival in the north said.

"There is only one way (to achieve peace) — (and that is) to overcome militarily Aideed. There is no other way."

"And if that will happen, not only will we solve (the violence) in south Mogadishu, we have solved all of Somalia's problems," Ali Mahdi Mohammed told Reuters on Thursday.

Across the shattered city's so-called green line, Mr. Ali Mahdi controls north Mogadishu, a relatively tranquil zone in contrast to the anarchic south. Mr. Aideed's militia forces are currently engaged in tense stand-off in the southern sector against fighters loyal to Osman Ali Ato, Gen. Aideed's former financier who broke with him last year.

According to Red Cross figures, 65 people died in hospital of war wounds when fighting between Ato and Aideed forces flared up April 4. Another 1,065 people were treated for wounds.

Another 150 to 200 civilians and militiamen from both sides were estimated killed on south Mogadishu's main streets between April 4 and May 1.

The International Committee of the Red Cross and its main partner in Mogadishu, the Somali Red Crescent Society, are bracing for a new upsurge in fighting in south Mogadishu and have flown in 17.5 tonnes of emergency medical supplies.

On Monday Gen. Aideed threatened to launch an attack against Mr. Ato within 48 hours. Although the assault never happened, visitors to the south say the situation remains very tense.

Looking relaxed and casually dressed in a blue cotton shirt and traditional Somali sarong, Mr. Ali Mahdi said he would meet Mr. Ato for talks when the former Aideed financier returned from medical treatment in the Saudi city of Jeddah.

In the interview at his freshly white-washed villa overlooking the ruined capital, Mr. Mahdi said he was in general agreement with Mr. Ato's proposals for national reconciliation.

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Barzani envoy said due in Jordan

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A delegation representing the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), visited the Kingdom on April and met with Jordanian officials who granted the PUK permission to open an office in Amman, the spokesman said. A PUK team is expected to arrive this month to open an office, the spokesman added.

"The INA and PUK agreed to maintain coordination and cooperation not only between the INA and PUK but also between all opposition factions in northern Iraq. We discussed issues relating to the situation in Iraq and means to strengthen cooperation inside Iraq," said the INA spokesman.

The PUK, headed by Jalal

Talbani, and KDP, headed by Massoud Barzani, are based in northern Iraq, contrary to other non-Kurdish opposition groups, the PUK and KDP do not directly call for toppling President Saddam Hussein's government but demand an expansion of the Kurdish self-rule authority and more Kurdish control over oil fields in northern Iraq.

The INA spokesman said that former Iraqi military intelligence chief Wafa's Samirai who arrived in Jordan last month from Damascus, will return to the Kingdom from Saudi Arabia after performing the pilgrimage. He ruled out speculation that the director will return to Syria after the pilgrimage.

links could other groups have with Iraq Al Mustaqbal, which will join another six weeklies issued by Iraqi opposition groups.

"Baghdad used to focus on the news of Iraqi opponents outside Iraq but the new paper will concentrate on the news of our people living in Iraq," Mr. Mohammad said.

Last month, the INA launched a daily four-hour radio service via satellite. It was the seventh radio service operated by Iraqi dissidents — four radio stations broadcast from the northern district of Iraq, one from Syria and one from Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Mohammad said he expected the majority of the 15,000 copies of Iraq Al Mustaqbal to be distributed inside Iraq.

"We have the ability to

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COLUMN

DNA shows humans, chimps 'same species'

SYDNEY (R) — Gorillas and chimpanzees should be reclassified into the same species group as humans because of the closeness of their DNA, according to a team of Australian and New Zealand scientists. "If you compare other mammals (rats), like genus rams (rats) there is much more divergence in DNA than there is between humans and chimpanzees," said scientist Simon Easton, from the John Curtin School of medical research in Canberra. Using a nuclear DNA test, the study found humans diverged from chimpanzees 3.6 to four million years ago. The two had diverged from gorillas between four and five million years ago.

Jackson Five could re-form, says brother

LONDON (R) — The Jackson Five, one of the most popular U.S. groups of the 1970s, are ready to re-form to record and tour, one of the group said. Elder brother Tito Jackson said the brothers met four weeks ago to discuss a plan to reunite the group, including superstar Michael Jackson, who has been pursuing a solo career. "There are a few plans for the Jacksons to get together and do some recording," he told BBC Radio.

Assault charges dropped against actor

EDGARTOWN, Massachusetts (R) — Actor Woody Harrelson appeared in a Martha's Vineyard court where charges stemming from a fight with two tabloid photographers were dropped. Harrelson, star of the movie Natural Born Killers, apparently became upset when the two paparazzi began shooting pictures after last year's wedding of his fellow Cheers television star, actor Ted Danson. Edgartown District Court Magistrate Thomas Teller said charges against Harrelson, who also played Woody in the hit sitcom Cheers, and countercharges by Harrelson against the two photographers from the star had been dropped.

Bloodsucking bat terrorises Mexican village

MEXICO CITY (R) — A giant batlike creature is terrorising a village in the northern Mexican state of Sinaloa, where goats are found dead daily with their blood sucked dry, witnesses said. Poor farmers from Calderon village have formed night vigilante squads to track down the flying beast that has been dubbed the "goat sucker." "We are telling people to keep the women and children locked up inside at night," one villager told national television network Televisa.

French parliament tones down personal stereotypes

PARIS (R) — French parliament passed a measure capping volume on personal stereos after deputies warned that loud music on headphones was creating a generation of deaf people. The legislation, voted unanimously by the National Assembly after earlier approval by the French Senate, allows the sale of personal stereos in France only if they are unable to produce more than 100 decibels of sound. It also requires labels on personal stereos warning prolonged listening at full power damages hearing.



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Interested investors are asked to contact Aqaba Region Authority — The Investment Unit, for more detailed information about investment and lease conditions during working hours not later than Saturday 25/5/1996.

**Prof. Dr. Fayez Khasawneh
President
Aqaba Region Authority**